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PALL MALL MAGAZINE

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Published Monthly at NEWTON STREET, HOLBORN, W.C.

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THE ANACHRONISM.

BY H C. BAILEY.

THE Excavator shut his eyes and tugged at a tamarisk root. A cloud of grey sand fell over him, and the dry fibres came away in his hand. The Excavator sputtered and rubbed the sand out of the corners of his eyes. An edge of something was poking out of the ground. Very gently the Excavator drew forth a round thing, dark brown and green—a brass shield eaten by centuries of rust. The Excavator whistled and sat down in the trench.

On the long rocks of Bodinnoc the rollers broke with a roar. The wet Atlantic gale had beaten the tamansks flat. A big-bosomed black cloud caught on the peak of Grantor; stinging down wind came the driven rain. The Excavator started up, and, hunching his shoulders, ran before it to his iron hut

* * * * *

Laloo was crying. She sat on the smooth grey slate of the foreshore and hugged her magic stone of serpentine to her little bosom, but the magic of it would not stop her bruises aching, and she sobbed to the roar of the breakers. Her beaver-skins grew glossy and damp, and her long black hair was matted with the spray. Mistily through the spindrift and the whirling rain she saw the ocean rollers dash grey on the black rocks of Bodinnoc, rush up into the caves, and shoot out again white torrents of foam. And the sea and the wind shouted together in her ears. Laloo started up and stood full-face to the blast, her beaver-skins flapping about her, her black hair streaming behind. Laloo flung out her white arms and prayed to the west wind.

Such was the way of Rataw, her father, the chief. But indeed the west wind had not availed Rataw at the last, for as he lay sick in the hut by the sacred stone, Peraw of the broad shoulders had broken in his head with a hammer of flint, and thereafter flung him into the quicksand. Laloo was held by Peraw's sister to see her father slain; and Laloo had gone to the quicksand with him, but that she alone of the folk had the trick to bevel the eyes of the slate needles. So Peraw was chief of the beehive huts under Bodinnoc, and his sister beat Laloo because her skin was white.

The men of Bodinnoc, little dark-haired fellows among the sand-dunes, were coming home from a river hunt, for the day was darkening, and, with two blood-quarrels afoot betwixt them and the men of Gantor, they went abroad only in the light. Laloo should have been back with a skin full of dog whelks for Peraw's supper, and Peraw's wife was screaming for her. Peraw on his shaggy pony saw the girl with her white arms flung out to the wind.

"*S—soo!*" Peraw shouted, which means jelly-fish—which meant an insult, since if you are a jelly-fish you are not good to eat. "*S—soo!*" Peraw shouted, but his voice was fighting against the wind, and Laloo did not hear.

His brother Ammaw picked out of the sand a three-cornered piece of schist and flung it at her. It struck her head, and she staggered forward and fell on her hands, and the little men of Bodinnoc laughed heartily.

"An end of prayer magic," said Peraw, and the little men laughed louder. For that was a jest of the chief.

Little five-feet-high men, shaggy with black hair and beasts' skins, they came skipping through the tamarisks, past the dark beehive huts, to have some sport with Laloo. Laloo had come to her feet again, and stood with her hand shading her eyes looking out over the grey travailing sea. Out of the west wind, out of the spindrift driving full for the black rocks of Bodinnoc, something long and low and black was cleaving the grey rollers. Tall, topped with fluttering gold, a form rose through the mist of rain and foam, then vanished into the waves. The black boat drove on before the wind to the rocks.

The little men saw it, and stopped running. "Prayer magic, prayer magic," was muttered, and they spat to their left hands, where the demons lurk. Only Peraw went steadfast on, and his shaggy brows were drawn.

Laloo had run down to the verge of the rising tide, and was looking through the

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waves. Once and again she saw a brown arm rise out of the trough of the water. Once and again wet golden curls were shaken in the air. Then on a great wall of water a body was borne in and flung down on the wrinkled slate. It lay there under the water very still, and the backwash was dragging it swiftly out again, when Laloo drew a long breath and ran down and caught it with one hand under the armpit, and flung her other arm round a boulder and braced her lithe little body to bear the greedy drag of the sea. The strain of it tore her arm on the stone, but she held, and then, as a new wave came to help her, dragged the body up through the foam. Then, gasping a little, she knelt beside it and drew the long golden curls from the face. Oh, by the sacred stone, it was a fair body! Never one so long was seen at Bodinnoc, and the arms of it were bigger than Laloo's legs, and the hair of it was like the sunshine. This —this was the god of the west wind come to her prayers.

A grip on her shoulder dragged her backward, and she fell supine before Peraw.

"*S—soo!*" said Peraw, his black eyes kindling. "Jelly fish! Witch! So prayer-magic brings the sea-demons to eat us all. White witch!" and he kicked her.

Laloo clapped her hand to her side. She did not dare roll away nor rise, but she looked at her god. Sure, he would aid her from Peraw. But her god only made a noise in his throat. Behind Peraw gathered the little men of Bodinnoc—not too near, for fear of the witch and her sea demon, but they fingered sharp throwing stones.

"Witch!" cried Peraw, putting his foot on her neck. "Send back thy demon to the sea." But Laloo said nothing; only her big blue eyes gleamed stormily at Peraw. Peraw tossed back his bison-hide. His short thick hand went to his girdle for the chief's knife of flint. "Send back your demon, witch," he snarled, and bent over her with the broad knife ready to cut out her heart.

But the sound of a scurry in the blown sand made him turn. The men of Bodinnoc had seen fit to go backward. For the body beside Peraw was sitting up, and certainly it was not a man. It was too big by far, and an oblong yellow thing grew along its hip, and a round box of moonshine along its side, and a long thing, grey-white, stuck up in the air far above its shoulder, and a band of sunshine was about its right arm above the elbow. The thing was coughing and wringing out its hair. Peraw turned to it with the flint knife uplifted. Peraw was minded to slay the demon before its strength came to it. The demon seemed to fear Peraw, for it fell on its knees before him and lifted its hands to beg of him mercy. Peraw came nearer and struck at the side of its head. The demon flung itself forward and caught Peraw about the middle, and sprang up and cast him mightily over its shoulder. And Peraw went down on his forehead on the slate, and his head was bent far back, and he lay very still.

The demon started to run. The men of Bodinnoc hurled their throwing-stones after him in a shower; but they struck him only on the back or not at all, for he ran stooping low, and he ran in zigzags, and he ran fast.

The men of Bodinnoc followed him but a little way. It is ill chasing demons in the twilight. And Laloo sat on the slate and laughed low to herself. For the god of the wind had come to her prayers, and her god had killed Peraw, and her father Rataw's blood was paid with blood.

The women came running from the huts and gathered about Peraw. But Peraw's head waggled loose on his shoulders as they raised him, and shrill to the roar of wind and wave they made the wail for the dead. The men came back and stood at gaze. But Ammaw, Peraw's brother, thrust through the men and the women, and took from the dead man's hand the flint knife of the chief.

"Now am I chief," Ammaw muttered, and looked round in the gloom to see who would deny it. "Now am I chief," cried Ammaw loud, and laughed.

And the men, bowing themselves, murmured "Chief!"

But Peraw's sister, with her hair about her face and blood on her breast where she had smitten it, checked in her wail, and "The blood debt, Ammaw!" she cried—"the blood debt!"

Ammaw fingered his stone. "A demon," he said. "No hunt for demons."

The men of Bodinnoc muttered praise of a wise chief.

"The witch, chief! the white witch!" cried Peraw's sister.

"Oh, ay," said Ammaw, fingering his stone. "The witch!" and he turned to Laloo, sitting alone by herself and smiling. Ammaw smote her down prone. "White witch!" he growled, and set his foot on her neck to be like his brother, and bent to strike.

Laloo tried to roll away where the waves shall roll her in. Let her see death, let her think death all the night ere it comes." And she struck Laleo across the mouth and on the breast, and laughed shrill. Then she helped bear Peraw away to lay him with honour in the burial-place.

And Laloo, struggling and screaming,

"Laloo flung out her white arms and prayed to the west wind"

"The sand, chief!" cried Peraw's sister.

"Oh, ay, the sand," said Ammaw, and called to the men to come bind the witch and cast her into the quicksand.

"Nay," said Peraw's sister, rising from beside the dead. "By the stone, no quick death, chief. Bind the white jelly-fish and tie her above the kissing sand, was bound with pigskin thongs. And Laloo was left on the slippery stone above the wet quicksand, staring wide-eyed through the dark at the foam-line creeping nearer and nearer to whelm her and cast her down to the greedy, loathsome embrace of the cold sand where her father lay.

The sea was licking at her feet, white foam lay on her hair, when she heard a thud. The demon had put a foot in the quicksand, and flung himself violently back. Laloo turned her head and peered landward. She saw the tall form rise faintly through the gloom. Then it vanished again, and she heard the rustle of tamarisks.

The demon drew his bronze sword and hacked at them. Casting armfuls on the quicksand, he made himself a path. Laloo saw him coming to her slowly. Then she was lifted in his arms and borne swiftly away. She heard him laugh softly above her head. Back on firm ground again, he set her down, and, stooping swiftly, sliced the bonds.

Laloo cast her stiff arms about his legs, and bowed her head in the sand before him.

The demon lifted her and laughed again, and, tapping his breast, "Glaucon, Glaucon," said he.

But Laloo, bowing her head, murmured, "*Da, da*," which meant god.

Glaucon patted her shoulder. "*Da?*" he asked, thinking it her name.

Laloo shook her head. "Laloo, Laloo," she said.

Glaucon laughed, and "*Eu ge*," said he, which means "good." "Laloo——" he opened his mouth, made signs of eating, and spread out his hands.

Laloo shook her head and began to cry. For she too was very hungry, and surely a god should have food at need!

"Have heart, for surely day comes," said Glaucon: but since he said it in Greek it consoled Laloo not at all. So he took her in his arms and caressed her, and that consoled her much. "But, as it seems to me, this place is evil," said Glaucon, and began to lead her away. So Laloo went with her hand in his through the tamarisks towards Grantor.

But soon she was dragging at his hand, for he was leading her to the burial-place, and not even with a god is it good to go at night to the place of the dead.

Glaucon turned to her. Laloo shook her head violently. Glaucon plucked his beard.

"Little one seems to think it evil," said Glaucon, looking round in the dark. "But I seem to smell baked meats. Wait, then, little one." And he left her, and stumbled on through the grave-mounds. "Hermes!" said Glaucon to himself, as his nose led him true to the half of a baked pig, warm yet from the spit.

It was set beside Peraw's unburied body, to feed him in the halls of the dead. "It is likely thou wouldst be less kind in life," said Glaucon. "But thou givest it with gracious hand dead. Dost give anything else, friend?" And he peered and fumbled in the dark. He found a bundle of dry sticks and flint and felspar and charcoal, for Peraw to kindle himself a fire in the other world. "Hermes thrice-great!" said Glaucon, and loaded himself and went back to Laloo.

Laloo drew back from him, making obeisance, for none but a god should dare thus to steal from the dead and pass unscathed. Then she came to him, and would have taken his burdens, for no man of Bodinnoc but would have held it shame to burden himself when he had a woman to be burdened. But Glaucon would give her no more than the scraps of flint and felspar, and Laloo marvelled at the ways of her god.

Glaucon led on up Grantor. The dead of Bodinnoc were useful, but he misliked the living as neighbours. He listened through the roar of the sea for the sound of running water: then, hearing none, turned to Laloo following humbly behind, and made the motion of drinking. Laloo pointed upward and towards the sea. Blacker than the night before them loomed the narrow mouth of a cavern, and out of it over the bare rock ran a tiny stream. Glaucon strode on into the cool gloom, but Laloo stopped, for it was the sacred cave of Grantor, where the god of the water lived, in the stream that was never dry in hottest summer drought.

"Good!" said Glaucon, sniffing the clean air, and set down his burdens and called "Laloo!" But Laloo would not come, lest the god of the water should be angry, and Glaucon ran back to her and caught her up with a laugh, and bore her in and set her down and kissed her lightly.

Then he took the flint and the felspar out of her little hands, and struck them together, and caught the spark on the charcoal, and blew it red, and soon the sticks were flaming yellow and weird shadows a-dance in the cavern. Turning flushed from the flame, he saw Laloo crouching humbly beside him and awe in her big blue eyes. Glaucon took her

"So they danced the blood-dance

chin in one hand and tilted her face to the firelight. The round face was very white in its cloud of black hair, but her lip was broken and swollen where Peraw's sister had struck it. There was the blue bruise of Peraw's foot on her neck, and when Glaucon put his arm about her she shrank away with a moan, for he had touched her aching side.

"Little one," said Glaucon gently, and stroked her hair so that she should understand. Then he turned away to the pig.

With his bronze sword he cut the daintiest meat and gave it to Laloo; and Laloo, taking it timidly, gazed round-eyed at him. For the women of Bodinnoc were used to pick the bones when the men had done.

But never a man of Bodinnoc ate so much as Laloo's god. And it was long ere he stretched out his great limbs and rose and went to the spring. First he washed his hands and his beard, and then he lifted water in his hands and spilt it on the stone, muttering the while, and then he filled his scabbard with water and brought it to Laloo and put it to her lips and tilted it for her to drink. Laloo drank long, but her big blue eyes never stirred from watching his face.

Glaucon went out to the hillside and came back with his arms full of heather, and strewed a bed for her bruises, and pointed to it. "Laloo, little one," said he smiling. But Laloo knelt down at his feet and bowed herself, and fell a-crying. For it was wondrous, past all hopes and prayers, that god or man should be thus kind. Glaucon lifted her, talking gently in his own tongue, and laid her down on the heather. Before sleep came she heard him crooning softly strange sounds: "*Zeu ana Dodonaie* . . ." Glaucon prayed to the father of all.

In the dawn the little men of Bodinnoc were troubled; for behold Peraw's death-feast was gone and the sand about Peraw's corpse was marked with the demon's feet. So, since Peraw was surely bait for the demon, they hurried him into a cyst, and wasted no more good meat upon him. Then all went down to the beach. The sea had washed Glaucon's tamarisks into the quicksand, and there was never a sign of Laloo. So they danced the blood-dance and sang the blood-song on the foreshore.

Lying flat on their faces in the mouth of the sacred cave, Laloo and Glaucon watched the little men skip. Laloo laughed low and looked round at Glaucon. His grey eyes were dancing with light, and he put his arm over her, and the two laughed together.

Thereafter things sad and strange began to befall the little men of Bodinnoc. All the beaver-skins pegged out on the sand to dry vanished in one night. Vanished on that same night the fattest pig of the common litter. At noontide, when the sun was straight above Bodinnoc, Ammaw stood upon the sacred stone and prayed to the demon for mercy. But neither the pig nor the beaver-skins came back.

In the sacred cave on Grantor Laloo and Glaucon had coverlets to their heather beds, and the pig was a fat change from the gulls and the rabbits which they snared.

Then on a night the chief's pony whinnied loud and long, and inside the beehive huts the little men and women clung together in fear. And behold, when they came out fearful in the yellow dawn, the hair was gone from the pony's tail. So there was more praying on the sacred stone. But the hair of the tail did not come back.

In the cave on Grantor Laloo looked at Glaucon, and horseshoes came on her little white brow. Glaucon was twisting together the pony's hair, and his big fingers worked clumsily, man-fashion. Laloo came and took the hair in her little hands. "Mine," said she. She had learnt words of Glaucon's tongue. "Mine." Glaucon laughed, and let her take the hair. Laloo sat down beside him and tied the ends of it round one of her tiny toes and began to plait with swift deft fingers. And she laughed and began to sing low. It was good to let Glaucon see she could work for him.

The big man drew his sword and began to whet it on a piece of schist; but often he looked up from the edge to Laloo. The broken lip had healed again and was full and red. The bruise had gone from her white neck. Pink heath-bells peeped from her glossy black curls. Her round white cheeks dimpled as she laughed in her song, and her blue eyes shone.

Her little brown fingers knotted the loose ends, and she slipped the plaited string from her toe and rose lightly and came to Glaucon and put her work in his

hands. "Thine, Glaucon," said she, and smiled at him.

Glaucon took it and took her hands with it, but he did not smile at her. His grey eyes were glowing dark, and as she looked into them Laloo's smile died and she hung her head, and the white round cheeks and neck grew shell-pink, and she drew back. But Glaucon held her hands still, and made a knee for her to sit, and drew her down. "Laloo, little one, dear maid," and the soft Greek words came low to her ear. Laloo hung her head, and the black curls fell about it, come kindly to hide her glow. Glaucon did off the ring of sunshine on his right arm, a gold bracelet wrought like a snake eating its own tail. Glaucon drew away her black curls and clasped it about her neck. "Laloo mine," said he, and kissed her mouth. Laloo hid her face between his neck and his shoulder. She trembled a little in his arm.

"Thine, Glaucon," said Laloo, very low. Her arms were crossed on her bosom, and her hands clasping tight on her magic stone. Glaucon took her arms in his hands and put them round his neck. Laloo had never dared of herself. But now, made bold, she looked up with wondering dark eyes. He smiled at her. Then she clasped him tight, and "Mine! mine!" she cried.

And that is how Glaucon came by a string to his bow. That day he string the long white stave, while Laloo watched wondering, and from the round box of moonshine, the quiver of tin, he took one of the strange things with sharp yellow points that Laloo had fingered fearfully when he was out, and shot the arrow whizzing to the sky, making trial of the bow-string. When the arrow shot up singing in the sunlight Laloo ran away for fear deep into the cave. Laughing, Glaucon came back to her, well pleased with his string, and made much of her, and taught her more words of his own tongue. That pleased her best of all things.

But the next night Laloo was in sore trouble. All day Glaucon had wrought with tough tamarisk boughs, weaving them into a long basket, and he covered them with the beaver skins from his bed. At night the moon was at the full, and the grey slate of the foreshore lay glistening. The tide was far out, and still as glass. Glaucon went to the mouth of the cave with his basket on his back, and looked keenly down at the beehive huts. All there was still and silent. Glaucon strode out into the moonlight, and Laloo came after timidly. Down to the marge of the silver water he went, and there set down his basket. He was striding out to sea, pushing the basket before him on the water, when Laloo ran up to him, crying "Glaucon" in misery. Glaucon waved his hand to her and laughed, and plunged into the sea, swimming out with his basket rippling the water before him.

Laloo sat down on the rock and hid her face in her hands, and rocked herself to and fro sobbing. For her god was gone away from her back to the sea.

Laloo could not bear to look, but the golden head went straight to the long rocks of Bodinnoc. There, cast high by the gale, was half his broken boat. Glaucon scrambled about on the rocks awhile, then dived and came up again—once, twice and thrice. But the moon was high still when a most wretched little woman sobbing between her knees felt a wet hand on her shoulder, and started up to see Glaucon all sparkling from the sea in the moonlight. And she caught him dripping to her bosom, and laughed and sobbed still.

But there were noble glittering things in the basket of beaver-skin and tamarisk. Another leathern quiver of the long arrows, and a round shield of brass, and a brazen helmet. Laloo spent the next day in burnishing them till they shone like the sun, while Glaucon laughed at her.

Now there was little heart in the Bodinnoc huts, for the demon troubled them sore, and had stolen other pigs and a she-goat. The men of Grantor, spying, had marked that the men of Bodinnoc went cowardly to the hunting, and went out late and went early back to the huts. And they did not talk together at all, which means that fear has hold. So the men of Grantor judged that the time had come to end their blood-quarrel.

In the grey dawn the sharp slate throwing-stones began to beat down the skin roofs of the huts, and the men of Bodinnoc, creeping out, heard Bagaw, the chief of the Grantor folk, raise the song of red war. A shower of the edged stones beat on the men of Bodinnoc as they gathered round Ammaw, and Ammaw raised his song in answer.

The din came to Glaucon's ear in the

cave, and he started up with his hand to his sword and went stealthily to the mouth of the cave. But when he was there he laughed loud. For the war of Bodinnoc and Grantor was like no war he had ever seen. Two crowds of little men, thirty yards apart among the tamarisks, dancing wildly till the blown sand flew in the air, with their skins and their shaggy hair flapping, and two hoarse voices howling uncouth sounds—it was matter for laughter, and Glaucon sat down on the rock and held his sides. Then the song and the dancing stopped, and the air was dark with throwing-stones, and still the two crowds kept together, to make each a good mark for the other.

Laloo came swiftly, putting the slate pins to her beaver-skins, and Glaucon looked up at her laughing. But Laloo caught her hand to her heart, and tears came in her eyes. For though they had given her to the sand, yet the little men of Bodinnoc were her own folk, and Rataw, her father, had been their chief. Glaucon watched her, and stopped laughing. Little men lay below them writhing on the sand, and still the men of Grantor had store of throwing-stones. They were drawing nearer and howling louder, and the men of Bodinnoc fell back, leaving their wounded. Out from the throng of Grantor folk a man ran and pounced on one of Bodinnoc, and dashed in his flint knife and began to cut out the heart.

Laloo caught Glaucon's hand "Glaucon—mine!" she gasped, and flung out her white arm to the fight.

Glaucon looked at her tears a moment, then ran back into the cave. A moment, and he was back again, with helm on head and shield slung about him, and he made his bowstring twang.

Then lightly down the heather of Grantor, through the sunlight, their demon came to the little men of Bodinnoc. The throwing stones were all spent, and they were come hand to hand with staves sharpened in the fire and knives of flint and slate. Bagaw was grappling with Ammaw, and had a hold of his right hand: Bagaw drove his flint knife into Ammaw's throat and fell upon him.

With the sun glittering on his helmet, on the shield that covered his heart, Glaucon stood still on the hillside. Once he looked up to the sky, and "*O Zeu*!" he said; then took an arrow, and the bow began to sing. Bagaw rolled over, with an arrow sped through his throat, dead upon dead Ammaw, and another man of Grantor, and another. Suddenly the fight was stayed, and all the little men turned gasping, to see how death came from afar. And the men of Bodinnoc knew their demon, and fell down in the sand and grovelled. Two of the Grantor folk picked up throwing-stones and cast them at Glaucon, but they fell far short. "*O kunes*," shouted Glaucon, and laughed, and shot an arrow at one, who flung out his arms wide and spun round and round and fell. The men of Grantor began to run. Glaucon shot at the foremost, and the man fell down in his tracks, plucking at the shaft that stung his thigh. Then the others too fell down and grovelled, like to the men of Bodinnoc.

Slow stately down the hill to them came Glaucon, leading Laloo by the hand. All glittering in the sunshine, taller by head and shoulders than any man of them, Glaucon sprang upon the sacred stone and made the bow sing under his thumb. And the little men rubbed their foreheads in the sand. Glaucon made the sign of rising to Laloo, and Laloo cried to them in their own tongue. "Rise, rise!"

But the little men only wriggled in the sand. Then Glaucon, taking the word from her, shouted, "Rise!" fiercely.

Fearful and trembling, the little men rose up and huddled together in two crowds: "*Da, da!*—god, god!" they cried with one voice, and held out quivering hands for mercy.

Glaucon bent and lifted Laloo. They stood together on the sacred stone, the big man a-glitter with armour, the little white woman with her beaver-skins and her black curls glossy in the sunshine. Glaucon began to fit another arrow to the string. The little men huddled together very close, gasping. Laloo, with a quick glance at Glaucon's laughing eyes, put out her little hand and laid it on the arrow. Glaucon let her take it. Laloo beckoned the little men nearer. They came timidly and fell down on their knees before the stone.

"Laloo," said Glaucon.

So they came and bowed in the sand before Laloo and kissed her feet.

"Thine," said Glaucon, putting his arm round her.

"Thine and mine," said Laloo.

And the men of Grantor and the men

"'Thine and mine,' said Lateo"

of Bodinnoc cried together, "Thine, Laloo, thine?"

* * * * *

Thirty-three centuries afterwards, in this last summer, the Excavator smoked a pipe over a rusted brass shield. "You're absurd," said the Excavator severely through his teeth. "You're anachronistic. You didn't ought to do it. Brass in the neolithic strata—brass when the tomahawks are schist! Brass! You're beastly brazen."

The rain had stopped rattling on the iron hut. A gleam of sunshine broke between the fat grey clouds as the Excavator strode out. The dash of the rain had set the sand sliding. There was a gap in the side of the trench. Something lay sparkling. The Excavator picked it up, and the raindrops on it flashed trembling to the sun. It was a gold circle—a snake eating its own tail. The Excavator sucked in his breath and fell on his knees and went a-burrowing in the hole. Soon his fingers rubbed against something flat. He drew out a thin slab of slate neatly squared. Gently he dusted the fine sand from it, then sprang up with a "Great Jove!" and held it to the sunlight. Scratched on it was a picture of a big man and a little woman. "It's the Greek touch!" muttered the Excavator, turning it all ways in the light. "Oh, Gad! it is Greek! This is what they call a Find . . . And I'll be called an untruthly faker—in four languages."

THE POET.

BY KATE PERUGINI.

THE poet wrote; but every sheet
Lay torn in fragments at his feet.
He strove to think; but not that day
Would inspiration come to stay.

A pale red mouth, eyes deeply blue,
A curl that wound its bright way through
His wand'ring thought, then seemed to rest
With tender touch upon his breast.

He shook his head,—would not allow
His mind to dwell on that fair brow,
From which the bright hair waving down
Soon met two lines of deeper brown.

His poem—Plato was its theme—
Did all at once such folly seem;
And write, if he must write at all,
He would of Mary, slim and tall.

And so he wrote of Mary's face,
Her winsome charm and pretty grace,
And then he took the verses where
He could that face with them compare.

But when he saw her smile, he knew
That all his praises were too few!
He tore the paper—flung him down,
And at her feet, kissed Mary's gown.

A SECRET OF OLYMPUS.

I.

DURING the past few years I have been several times questioned as to the circumstances of my acquaintance with Professor Vaini, whose tragic end was described in a previous number of this Magazine. Till now I have hesitated to speak of events with which I was associated, through regard for the susceptibility of those whom they chiefly concerned. But now that all save I have passed away, there seems no indiscretion in making known Vaini's remarkable discovery, whereof he was wont to say that it had once been given him to tread very near the footsteps of the gods.

In venturing back into the sunshine of my youthful days, let me begin by saying that a search for the keys which unlock doors in antiquity has been, through many years, the fascinating occupation of my leisure hours. Had I the art to weave a love-story, the slender outline of this narrative might be graced and enlivened. But with a view to reach the most accurate record of things which happened thirty-five years ago, I am about to dictate my recollection of them to a typewriter, without pause or interruption.

At Rome, in the month of November 1869, I was received as a student by Professor Vaini, and spent a couple of hours daily with him in his rooms at the Trinità dei Monti. When I first knew him, Vaini was forty-five years old—a handsome man, of graceful manner, which rarely passed beyond a formal courtesy. He possessed wide literary knowledge, and had devoted a dozen years to the study of scientific subjects in their occult bearing upon modern humanity. In those days whoever entered the Papal dominion passed within the repose and remoteness of a bygone century. From out its monk's hood the mediæval face of Popish Rome looked forth grey and indomitable. In intellectual bias my instructor was nowise at variance with the pagan shadowland of his surroundings. He had an unexpressed, albeit conscious, disdain for modern ways, though I came to know him as one who sought the latest discovered altitudes of critical research. He wrote and spoke French, German, and Spanish, and had translated the Arabic writings upon transmigration of Ormès and Almodoro. As an experimental chemist he discovered the composition of the inimitable poison of the Borgias. However softly he spoke, he underlined his thought, and I have never known a man who so intuitively divined a mystical significance. His talk was subtle and illuminative, and the range and variety of his reading gave his mind a brilliant insight. He

seemed continually conscious of that elusive world which is beyond our commonplace futility.

I was first attracted to Professor Vaini by reading of his experiments in suspended animation, wherein, having buried a man alive in the crypt of Santa Bibiena, he brought him forth after ten days, like Lazarus—a demonstration of fasting which in later years has frequently been surpassed. He was deeply read in the language and lore of the Greeks and Romans, and I soon perceived that the Olympians were more to him than abstract impersonations. He affirmed that the principle of divine life entering into a human body exists in the tradition of all ages, and that there is nothing more incredible in the Labours of Hercules than in the Plagues of Egypt; that the stories of the Ark and of the Argonauts are equally true, and that Aphrodite risen from foam is not more improbable than Lot's wife turned to salt.

It is an obvious fact that the results derived from our study in the equations of life are dependent upon the mood in which that study has been approached. With me the mood was one of rare delight in progressive analyses, and my eagerness unluckily aroused the Professor's displeasure. I mentioned one morning an observation made by me at Pompeii and confirmed at the Museum of Ghizeh, which, as the reader will see later on, was connected with a discovery upon which Vaini prided himself, and which to this day is known to few. It was largely for the purpose of obtaining his estimate of the occult arts that I had become his pupil. The circumstance which a year before had attracted my attention was that upon many mummy-cases, as well as within a few Greek painted tombs and on several Pompeian walls, there exist eccentric combinations and repetitions of colour, which, however seemingly careless, are seen upon closer scrutiny to have been deliberately designed. The famous pediment at the Temple of Isis was thus curiously bordered, and the same suggestion is apparent in the colouring of early Greek pottery. My observation had resolved itself into the theory that to the classic mind the harmonies of colour held no less significant inspiration than the accords of music.

One morning when we were seated in the Professor's study, he as usual at his big table strewn with a literary medley, an explanation of the method whereby we trace conceptions to and fro across the intellectual horizon presented the awaited opportunity.

"I am convinced," I said, following his thought, "that the drapery of at least four Pompeian figures tells a story that is but half hidden on the line of our horizon."

The Professor leaned back in his cane chair, and fixing his eyes upon the cabinet of minerals opposite, murmured in a subdued and altered voice, "What an odd idea!"

"It is not idle fancy," I replied. "You cannot have failed to observe in the decorations of Pompeii half-concealed fragments which are without relation to the more brilliant hues. If you have examined the so-called *tomb of the garlands*, at the Herculanean gate, you will have been struck by the unnatural colouring of the flowers."

"Chemical change of centuries," muttered the Professor.

"Moreover," added I, piqued at his indifference, "there is near the gate of Nola a vividly painted tablet with the inscription 'CESSIT COMMUNI PROPRIUM,' at a place where the public right ceased. Now, within the Nolan gate, at a closed street, is the same tablet, with identical colouring, but without the words. Herein, then, is revealed that to the classic mind a connection existed between

thought and colour. That an idea may be figured in colour is not new, for it is as natural and obvious as that certain mental conditions are expressed by sound. As Sappho asks, '*What better than a birdsong tells the meaning of sunrise?*' Or what Greek, looking upon the sea and watching its purple brighten to emerald in the shallows, could fail to divine its meaning?"

"And that meaning was?" ejaculated the Professor.

"That life, as well as Nature, has its harmonies."

To my astonishment, Vaini rose with angry irritation, and I have often wondered what was to follow. Before he could utter a word the door opened, and Facino, his boy-of-all-work, hastily entered, with a visitor's card pencil-marked *Urgentissimo*. My instructor abruptly withdrew to an adjoining room, where he remained such a long half-hour that I took my departure,—and felt profoundly relieved the following day when, on resuming our studies, no reference was made to my indiscretion.

A fortnight later, remaining one rainy day to lunch, I met my associate pupil, Orion Marblehead, of Massachusetts, a young man three years older than myself. He had spent several winters in Rome, and larded his observations upon the Eternal City with expressive Americanisms. He was given to theorising upon things ancient and modern, had much natural curiosity, and worshipped success. He had a strong, clear-cut face, was a superior chess-player, and possessed boundless self-confidence, which he manifested in the frequent exclamation, "Hell couldn't catch me if I had an hour's start." We had made an end of the exquisitely dressed lobster salad, which, with biscuits and cheese, was the sole refection our vegetarian tutor placed upon the table, and were sipping black coffee served by Bonifacino, or "Facino," when the Professor was again summoned by Monsignor Belti's coadjutor to call upon him at his office. Mr. Marblehead and I lingered, and he told me of our instructor's villa overlooking the Lake of Nemi, where Madonna Cesarano—an old bourgeoise, widow of a brigand of blessed memory and mother of Facino and of a daughter named Hebe—kept house. This rural habitation, which was Vaini's refuge in summer, was referred to as Villa Cesarano, or by its more poetic appellation, Rocca di Falco.

"When I first went on a visit to Rocca," said Mr Marblehead, hilariously terminating his description of the Cesarano family, "I made the widow a present of a flagon of Demerara rum, at which her face flushed with pleasure till I mistook it for sunset. She replenishes that flask with a half-and-half mixture of Vermouth and Cognac, and you can tell when the bottle is getting empty, because the old lady's snap oozes away in proportion. She will tell you about papa Cesarano, who used to clean the knives on her—as often as he was out of gaol."

My companion's frankness and piquant conversation moved me to hazard a question relative to the studies he was pursuing.

"On my twentieth birthday," he answered, lighting a *cigaro shello*, "I resolved to taste neither meat nor drink till I had solved the central problem. I had previously constructed a method of traversing the whole sphere of human thought and examining its crannies and recesses. I had a craving for severe and simple principles, and having pledged myself to touch the highest point, my first resolve was to throw overboard all save knowledge undefiled. I had read Vaini's essay on the New Renaissance, and entered with enthusiasm upon his experiment of a substitution of classic for modern ideals. I said to him, 'I am all for the new, but a new which begins by returning to the old.' Before you have travelled far with the Professor you will find that he has an astounding disregard of probabilities.

When I first listened to him I wondered that a man of such keen intellect should deliberately choose to spend his life in a labyrinth. But I soon learned that he has a pill for every earthquake, and is no more wide of the mark than a gilt-edged prophet is likely to be."

"Who is Monsignor Beltà?"

"That is one of our mysteries, one that Vaini never speaks of and that I know little about. Our studies are not orthodox, and a hundred years ago the Holy Inquisition would have lodged us in St. Angelo. Now, hesitating to run us in, it has half a mind to run us out of the country. Then there are queer stories about Madonna Cesarano's daughter, Hebe, and her young man the Dogger. I suppose they include me, but bless you! give me an hour's start and Hell won't catch me!"

"As she looked towards me with hand-shadowed eyes."

Orion was seated with his back to the door, and while he spoke that door opened softly, and a young girl looked composedly in upon us, fixing the wistful splendour of her eyes upon me—the stranger. Her face was of the classic type met with among Roman women; and so noiseless had been her approach, so velvet-shod her foot, that the instant's presentment of her tranquil beauty might have seemed less an actual presence than some fleeting ideal of one whom the Immortals loved. Then she drew back and the door closed. Mr. Marblehead noticed my momentary abstraction and glanced sharply back.

"A statuesque girl," I explained, "or rather that sense of romantic divination which haunts all Rome."

"A girl!" he ejaculated; then with an air of indifference added, "That's Hebe."

Half an hour passed; Orion went his way, and the Professor did not return. I stepped forth upon the terrace, where oleanders grew, and whence one looked across a multitude of domes and façades and pinnacles—a patchwork of roofs and balconies, of chimneys and cupolas and belfries; of mighty ruined fragments—over

all which the Roman sunshine spread its blazing splendour. But at that moment I gave small heed to ancient Rome, for there before me, a watering-can in her hand, was the girl who had gazed upon me through the half-open door.

As she looked towards me now with hand-shadowed eyes, the divine delight in life leaped in her face—the same spontaneous gladness that sets the birds singing in springtime . . . at the season of blossoms and love.

"Good morning," I said. "You are the Professor's Castellana, and I am his new pupil."

For an Italian girl her voice was singularly musical, and in that first brief meeting I was conscious that something in her nature, some subtle and mystical charm, made her separate and apart. Beneath that youthful calm what chords might vibrate, as yet but half attuned?

"You come each day," I said at parting, "to sprinkle the oleanders. Some morning I will pass again, to lean at ease and mark where poplars cast their slender lengthening shadow and listen with you to faint echoes of bygone days."

Her dark eyes looked golden in the noonday, like yellow catseyes, and as she smiled her teeth showed white as fresh-cut ivory. Yet across her face floated a swift tinge of tragic passion—as unfathomable as the depth that lurks between the rose leaves. "Signorino, come when you please," she answered simply. "I know you already . . . the Professor has told me of you. We shall not be too busy to listen, nor too dull to hear."

II.

Week after week, through the silent December, my studies pursued their fascinating course. To fit my sightless eyes to the focus and perspective of those ancient times I was eager to explore, we entered upon an examination of that classic literature which is woven through Italian history. Vani instructed me minutely in the mystical life of renowned men and women, teaching me to express concisely the outline of heroic careers, in the delineation of which, according to geometric rule, I became an adept. It grew clear to me that every situation in life may be depicted in a mathematical form, and that the development of this principle might be made to give the perfect semblance of individual character. Herein the Professor's faultless touch could indicate that unknown quantity which in every problem turns upon pure accident—a quantity Fate's caprice often delivers against us with tremendous effect, or rarely—when all other hope has failed—turns with forceful sarcasm in our favour. Leaving our demonstration of heroic ideals, I passed to the study of the Professor's method as applied to Natural phenomena.

One morning on arriving at Vani's lodging I found in his study the girl Hebe Cesarano, dusting books and tidying the writing-table. I had twice spoken with her since our first meeting; and now—pausing in her occupation, and standing against the background of veiled shadows—she began by informing me that my instructor was absent for the day.

"Gone to Rocca di Falco?" I queried. "He must need relaxation from his lurid chaos of thought. Even I begin to long for a glimpse of cornfields and the river, the smell of wild hyacinths, and a tint of reddening boughs."

"He is not there to-day," she answered; then, talking with suave Italian light and shade, she vaguely mentioned an importunate visitor.

I crossed the room, and looking in her face was startled at its pallor. "Who is this visitor?" I asked.

"Signorino, the name of Monsignor Beltà is unfamiliar to you; but it is as well known to Romans as the Holy Office itself. The ideal which the Church does not like is a crime. Whether the Monsignore aims at the Professor, or at Signor Orion, or at you or me, or at all,—who can say?"

"But what has the Holy Office to do with any of us?"

"You may well ask. It is like wondering what things exist beyond the horizon. In ancient days all roads led to Rome; in mediæval centuries, between cursings and indulgences, they led to Paradise. Who dare say whither they lead now, if not to a convent for women and the Inquisition for men!"

I listened to her words with curious interest, puzzled to think what secret lurked within the span of this young life—a secret not so unfathomable but that Vaini had taken its depth.

My hesitation provoked her to speak the warning whose suggestion I had passed by.

"If you will accept advice," she ejaculated, "leave these musty riddles that are beyond the guessing of a youth, and go. Leave Rome. Craving after vast things makes people small; the Immortals were content to seem no more and no less than themselves."

In those dangerous days I was twenty-two, and no wiser than my age. Hebe was eighteen, and it stung me to be lectured as a boy.

"Speaking of leaving," I ungraciously interrupted, "Signor Orion tells me you abruptly left the convent where you had been placed."

"Dio di mi Alma!" she exclaimed, with a careless laugh, "it was because one morning I wrote SACRAE DIANAE under a saintly image. Those words ring in my ears—like birds that sing although the day is dead."

"What can those words be to you?"

"The illustrissimo Professor tried to make me remember—an experiment that lasted months."

"What were you to remember?"

"Sacrae Dianae, of course, and her temple that used to be in the gardens at the foot of modern Nemi. He will show you its foundations, but I recall its marble colonnade, its statues and altars, even its processions—though, alas, the strings we touched are silent now."

"Hebe," I cried, "this splitting of ancient straws in our human tragedy has made you mad. What can you mean? What was Vaini's experiment?"

"He bade me fix my eyes upon yonder picture of the Grecian Hebe soaring towards Olympus, and after long waiting questioned me, as though to measure life's come and go across the light and shade of places known in happier days."

"In happier days!"

"Yes: days when men and women lived near to the Immortals, who anointed them with genius and loved them as equals. When endowments made for eternity were not short-lived; when children were not born with the instinct consciousness that life must die; when the brilliants had not yet turned to glass."

Her eyes moistened as she spoke; and in asking myself what could be the life of one so singularly gifted and so strangely ill-starred, I became absorbed in my musing, till, presently turning to question further about the colonnades and altars and silent strings, I discovered that she had left the room unnoticed.

At Christmas Professor Vaini invited his two pupils to spend a day at Rocca di Falco. Orion Marblehead proposed that I should lunch at his lodgings and thence drive with him to the villa. Our luncheon was a substantial dinner of

heef, montepulciano and macaroni, for our instructor had not converted either of us to a vegetarian diet.

"If you wish deeply crusted ideas," Mr Marblehead remarked as we seated ourselves, "you should dine well and drink good wine."

I asked my companion if amid the originality of our studies he ever regretted what had been left behind.

"What did I leave?" he ejaculated, "modern academic shows, a sick self-consciousness of nerves, and a high-pressure race for wealth."

I turned our conversation to the girl, Hebe Cesarano, and it was with surprise and displeasure that I listened to his careless declaration of a purpose to take her from Rome in July upon the completion of his studies

"No carrying on the war without animals of that description," he explained; "and I consider Hebe a very produceable young woman,—she has a forearm of remarkable heft, and I once saw her run up Monte Cavo without turning a hair. She has been living rather on the loose, and somewhere in the background there is a man she is pledged to marry. His name is Gardullo Mangicane, and he is a Dogger. I intend to take her away, because she is lost in her present surroundings—not to mention that the Inquisition puts women into convents for less cause than she has given. Marry her? Oh yes, with mutual option of separation, of course. The fact is, a wife is awkward; she dives under when wanted, and comes to the surface when you wish her away. Marriage is no longer up to date; however, I have my points from start to finish, and when I want a thing I get there."

Half an hour later we were seated in an old-fashioned vettura, he smoking his favourite *sigaro shelto*, and I thinking of Hebe and of the things the future was ripening. The Campagna lay in the drowse of a mid-winter afternoon, that seemed the long-drawn calm of centuries. Upon the horizon was the lustrous line of the sea. At that hour, when shadows are longest, the sunset laid a coralline flush upon the Apennines, that faded to pale violet-blue. Till suddenly the twilight gathered, and behind us through the darkness gleamed the lights of Rome.

At the other side of Genzano we drew up near a house where Vaini welcomed us, and where presently Madonna Cesarano spread a supper of trout and eggs. And Hebe was there, and her fifteen-year-old brother Facino, who, with a maid-of-all-work, Madonna designated *la famiglia*.

I was down betimes next morning, summoned by Facino to coffee and rolls. Madonna had long been astir, and greeted me with a smile. She was glad I had slept well; she herself had slept badly—something was on her mind: she had no patience with people who did not pay their debts, and she owed a scudo for refilling the flask Signor Orion had given her—I probably had not a scudo to spare—oh, *mille grazie!* Thus for the first time I saw Madonna's favourite play—throwing flowers to herself, as the Italians call it—the frequent compliment, the occasional scudo.

Here in summer Vaini lived, in scholarly retirement, embroidering upon old models. It was a quaint house, its pavement smoothed by tread of long-departed feet. A dining-room, ante-camera and the Professor's study occupied the ground floor, and half a dozen bedrooms were above. Its materials bore token of having been previously adapted to some other building, carved marble fragments being mortared in with untrimmed blocks. It had pillars that wore a monastic appearance, as of some cloister vineyard, and a battered sarcophagus received the water of a tiny stream that overflowed with ceaseless trickling splash. From tiled

roof to garden gate, Time had stained and mellowed its walls to rusty orange-red, giving it thus the benediction of that graceful age which marks Italian houses.

Coffee disposed of, the Professor and Orion went botanising on Monte Cavo, whilst I remained to study botany with Hebe in her wild-rose garden. As we strolled forth down the hillside, I beheld for the first time the Lake of Nemi, the *Speculem Dianae*, on whose placid surface, as the morning wore on, the silvery aquamarine deepened to amethyst. About it hung a melancholy charm, a sense of mystery and isolation, which not even the brilliant sunshine could dispel. Opposite rose the battlemented village of Nemi, as rugged as the rock-piled monasteries and towered castles of the Abruzzi. Behind were cliffs now faintly purpling with profusion of wild anemones, on whose scarred face one reads the silent yet eloquent story of heroic idylls,—archaic sunrise, Roman day, and mediæval twilight.

"In such a scene," I cried, turning to Hebe, "who does not envy the antique life spent wholly out of doors?"

Beside us, as we strayed, the russet lichen shone fine as velvet, and I took Hebe's hand in mine and made her feel its softness. How beautifully she held herself, and with what charming grace she listened, and how exquisite the Roman sounded when she spoke! Her words expressed an infinite longing for the Spring—for its daffodils and amaranths, for the lustre of its sunshine and the love-philter of its fragrant shade. Here was her wild rose garden, and in that enchanting stillness we walked an hour up and down the little pergola heaped with wistaria vines that laid fantastic flickering shadows at our feet.

"Is it true, Hebe," I asked, "that you are descended from a Roman girl whom in early Christian centuries Romulus Augustulus loved, and whose cupbearer she was?"

"My father said so, Signorino, and so his father said,—it is a story thus handed down for fifteen hundred years."

"Mr. Marblehead tells me you will leave Rome with him next summer—as *his* cupbearer."

"For shame, Signorino!"

"But he adds that you are pledged to marry another."

"Possibly, Signorino."

"You have confided to me that the Holy Office has a watch upon you."

"Alas, Signorino!"

"And that some mysterious and perhaps tragic tie unites your imagination with a vanished age."

"Which you do not believe, Signorino."

"*Povera ragazza*, you are abundantly provided with sources of unhappiness."

"Signorino, will you show me a way out of them?"

"Tell me first how you found a way in."

Instead of answering, the girl fixed her eyes with abhorrence upon a young man wearing a chasseur costume who stood at the end of the path. Turning without a word, she left me and walked back the way we had come. I instinctively knew the stranger, in his Papalino brigand uniform, to be Hebe's betrothed, Gardullo Mangicane. He was a perfect Apollo—in pigskin—having the mark of the beast in his sombre-eyed, weather-beaten face. His glance followed Hebe's retreating figure; then, looking at me with the furtive scrutiny of a cunning animal, he lifted his hand in grave salutation and sauntered carelessly away.

As midday drew near, I returned to the Villa, and coming into its darkened vestibule beheld Hebe before a table filling a porcelain vase with roses and fine

leaves; and standing thus amid crimson flowers that seemed the setting of her golden age, she looked so magically beautiful that in the witchery of that shaded moment the world might have taken her for a poet's creation, as elusive, yet as enchanting, as the strange memories she loved. Years after, I begged that trifling vase of Vaini; and now each Maytime, when the perfume of Italy touches the air, I fill it with great roses and fine leaves and place it far from the sunshine, where in an hour's retrospect I breathe anew the scent of Hebe's garden, and hand in hand walk once again with haunting memories.

III.

One Sunday morning, some weeks later, when the suave days of April tempted me to hours of exercise or idleness on the Campagna, I was sketching at Castel dei Pazzi, five miles from Rome. Vaini had cautioned me to take a revolver on my rambles, as the sheepdogs are fierce and many, but neither he nor I nor Orion possessed such a weapon, and in Papal days the purchase of firearms was discouraged. But in the Professor's table drawer lay an ivory-handled stiletto with a slender shining blade, and this he bade me take on my excursions.

"Better than nothing," he said, with a laugh,—"whether against mongrels with two legs or four."

Whilst putting the finishing touches to my sketch, I became instinctively conscious of an unseen presence. Turning abruptly, I beheld Gardullo Mangicane standing a few paces behind, and my surprise at this stealthy approach was such that my hand dropped to the slender-bladed stiletto. He perceived the movement, smiled, and carelessly wished me good-morning.

"This is an intrusion," he murmured, "yet it is but for a moment, and you will not refuse a word of advice. I wish," he added with malicious intention, "to ask your opinion of the girl I am to marry—la bella Cesarano"

"What should I have to say about her?" I exclaimed.

"Much," he answered, with a show of snarling temper,—"you that know her so well. I begin to suspect she loves elsewhere. Other men, look you, whistle and their girl comes: at sight of me at Nemi she started, and left not only me—but you."

"Why, then, do you wed her?"

"Because I gave my promise to her dying father of blessed memory,—alas, dear man, he died as poor as a Spaniard. What of that against my pledged word? Let it pass too that I should be justified in objecting to the influence and example of the illustrissimo Professor, who spends his time (and hers) in studies all sensible men condemn, or of your dissolute companion, who avows his purpose to corrupt her. But who shall say she is not more imminently menaced from another quarter?"

"That other quarter," I assented, replacing my colours and brushes, "being, of course, a return to the convent. So you are in no haste to set the wedding-bells ringing!"

An Italian's face darkens curiously in moments of anger, and a sinister shadow gathered now upon the Cacciatore's visage. "Do you think," he cried, "that I will see the girl taken from me? My redress is swift and easy. You presume to taunt,—and a voice to which you shall be made to listen will answer."

I rose and looked him steadfastly in the eyes. "La bella Cesarano, as you call her," I said, dwelling upon the name, "has already spoken, and what she said

pleases me. I have heard enough from you,—may I soon hear the voice to which I shall be made to listen?" And, waving a careless defiance, I walked away.

It was my intention, on going to Vaini's the following day, to tell him of my meeting with Gardullo. But I perceived an unusual preoccupation in his curt *buongiorno*, and knew something impended. Before him lay a Roman tile, and pointing to it: "Let me begin," he said, as I seated myself, "by congratulating you upon having detected the principle of ancient colour-language, of which, to my amazement, you spoke some months ago. I believe its knowledge to be limited to half a dozen men. At that moment I was not disposed to discuss so technical a subject with an amateur, but now, circumstances connected with it and involving us all, oblige me to put you on your guard. The Papal Government does not share our passion for the occult, and my experiments have incurred displeasure. I may be summoned before the Holy Office and ordered to leave Rome, in which event my papers will perhaps be destroyed. With them might perish this painted tile, which is the material demonstration of the only Secret of Olympus man's ingenuity has surprised. You cannot be seriously involved, therefore I wish to entrust it to your keeping, together with my elucidation of its meaning."

"But, Maestro," I interrupted, startled at his words, "make your escape while you may, and leave the rest with me."

"Suspected, watched, and without a passport, I should not go far," observed Vaini; "moreover the attempt would be an avowal of wrong. To ignorant eyes this object conveys nothing. In your portfolio its translation would pass unnoticed. I commend them both to your greatest care."

So saying, the Professor placed in my hands a slightly broken Roman tile and a sheet of paper covered with his minute handwriting. The tile is of terra cotta, ten inches by six, and half an inch thick. At that moment I bestowed upon it only a hasty inspection, but subsequently it was often examined by me during Professor Vaini's lifetime, and now, after thirty-four years, acting as his literary executor, I give to the world its facsimile [see frontispiece] and his exposition of its conjectured meaning translated by me from Italian into English.

"I found this tile," he said, "ten years ago in a trench I was authorised to sink across the site of the Temple of Diana in the so called gardens beside the Lake of Nemi. Its design represents, as you see, a golden vessel filled with flowers, suspended against an intricate background. At that time I had progressed little farther in colour-language than you have done, but recognised in this a marvellous specimen. A consultation with three of my confrères in Berlin achieved no more than to satisfy us all that it is a poem relating to the Lake of Nemi, which, as every one knows, was sacred to Diana. Here and there a word could be conjectured, through comparison with the half-dozen clue fragments which are all that have been deciphered since the discovery was first made in the time of Cosimo dei Medici.

"Its meaning might have remained unknown had it not been revealed to me under extraordinary circumstances. You may be aware that two years ago, having detected in the girl Hebe Cesarano a mind marvellously receptive of occult phenomena, and a familiar knowledge of ancient times which, however elusive, is always original and accurate, I commenced with her a series of mesmeric exercises intended to recover this shadowy association. The result alternated between much failure and an occasional luminous remembrance. I was about to abandon the experiment, when it occurred to me to direct her mesmerised intelligence upon this tile. To my wonder she read it at sight and evidently from memory. Neither I nor any one can explain this, nor can she—when not in a mesmeric condition—

discern any meaning in its design. Through various tests the fact remains that, when her faculties are specially roused and applied, she possesses a curious power of recalling incidents that happened many centuries ago. So much for Hebe Cesarano.

"Now, no man will doubt that certain colours produce special and invariable impressions upon the mind. From this simple perception the ancients elaborated the significance of particular blendings and juxtapositions. A remote antiquity recognised that human emotion is reflected and expressed in the aspect of natural things. The changing face of clouds—the crystalline line of the horizon—the flush of dawn—the sapphire of the sea—opalescent tints upon the mountain—the statuesqueness of a splendid tree—an emerald meadow, asphodel strewn—a wave leaping in the sunshine—these and many like were the stigmata, the brandmarks upon which they fixed a distinct and universal meaning. To the Greeks, colour interpreted the profoundest human emotion. The beauty of the scenes they loved inspired them with a lyric note, and herein they perceived a motive as tender and intense as human voice. They believed that far in advance of them the Immortals, when they walked upon earth, understood that in form and colour lies a mystical expression of the heart of things. What wonder that upon a foundation thus gifted and inspired—seeing intuitively that everything gracious and refined has its perspective—the priests and poets and musicians developed and perfected a colour-language in whose subtle diction they wove a gamut of limitless expression! So enduring was their work that across the wreck of the ancient world it survived through the ages of crusading chivalry in heraldic blazonments and bannerets and distinctive costume."

I lost not a moment in transferring the tile to my apartment, where, pushing aside a wardrobe in my bedroom and raising the carpet, I removed two tiles from the floor, leaving a space into which I laid my charge. The midday gun at St. Angelo marked the hour as I finished, and with its sound came a tap at my sitting-room door.

Without waiting an answer, two men crossed its threshold—one a cleric, with the suave and unctuous manner inseparable from the Roman priest, the other a police official in civilian dress. A rough-looking fellow stood in the hall in reserve, had I proved troublesome; but this I was far from doing. Personally I had nothing more serious to anticipate than an order to leave Rome. I was obviously to be interrogated with a view to coaxing or coercing from me some damaging admissions about Vaini and the others. A hundred and fifty years earlier the recipient of a summons from the Holy Office would not have listened to it with composure. As recently as the middle eighteenth century there were forcible methods of persuasion. But in the reign of Pius IX. the faggots were cold, the thumbscrews rusted, the scabbard empty.

A few words explained that the Holy Office wished information which I could give; and upon my assurance that everything I knew was at its disposal, we descended to a closed carriage. As we drove away I noticed a man loitering on the opposite side of the piazza with a cloak drawn round him, and under the shadow of his soft broad hat I recognised Gardullo Mangicane. We drove in silence to the Via St. Ufizio, where, shown into the room of a subordinate secretary, I was invited to give my name and age, and to state whether I had any pecuniary means of support. I answered I had none. I was further required to exhibit such articles as were in my pockets, to show that I carried no weapon. Luckily Vaini's stiletto was in my table drawer with the sketching materials. These brief formalities disposed of, I was led up a circular flight of stone stairs to a door

The Lake of Nemi

SPECULEM DIANAE

This to the artist of life, the singer, the sweet musician—
She whose voice is musical as the beat of receding oars.
She whispers, "Here is my mirror, my painted veil;
From its deep, O Lover, watching the sun kissed ripple,
May rise the remembered image you seek!"

The scar faced crag is young in the light of morning,
Beneath it the lakeside thrills with melody;
The gods listen to rustic pipe and lute string,
Laughing, as nearer the shepherdess ventures,—
Till the arms of the amorous faun are about her!

What is life, if when we are young we love not?
Or what burden is heavier than a heart grown cold?
The fugitive days come and go while we linger—
Beloved, take the most flowery way to thy fate,
Ere the God bestowed gift of dreamless sleep be thine.

Translation into English of Hebe Cesarano's rendering into Italian of the colour language expressed on the painted Roman tile. (See FRONTISPIECE.)

where an official waited, by whom I was conducted into the presence of a small man, who, having risen from his writing-table, was walking leisurely to and fro with his hands behind him. This was Monsignor Beltà. He turned as I entered, and eyed me with keen steel-grey eyes, whilst taking a pinch of snuff. I noticed a small-pox mark over his right brow, and observed his habit of fingering the border of his soutane with thumb and forefinger.

He motioned me to a chair, seated himself, and for ten minutes plied me with rapid questions. Then he paused, took another pinch of snuff, and reflectively rubbed his soutane as though verifying its texture.

"This Professor Vaini," he continued, "with whom you say you study literature, is a man of sinister fame. How came you to hear his name?—who sent you to him?"

"My confirmation teacher in New York was by birth an Italian—a schoolmate and friend of Vaini."

"Tell me exactly the nature of your studies."

"I seek the truth. I wish to know great lives. I pursue Nature, because it is purer than man and more beautiful than woman."

"You have a fellow-student, of whose morals I receive bad reports. He openly avows the intention to abduct a Roman girl - Hebe Cesarano."

"Monsignore, my own morals are above suspicion, but I dare not vouch for those of my friends."

"Young man!" he exclaimed angrily, "take heed to your answers: there is a persiflage about them must instantly be corrected—by yourself or by me. As to the girl, she is compromised in reputation with your fellow-student; she is an adept or disciple of Vaini's necromantic hallucinations; she is also betrothed to an excellent man, an officer in the Cacciatori. Now, what is she to you?"

"Monsignore, she has promised to be a sister to me."

"I have a great mind to give you and your sister thirty days *al segreto*."

"Monsignore! All that lightning to kill a mosquito!"

"Here's a last chance to save yourself. Conjurors, wizards, and such folk are not taken seriously in our time. But there are political jugglers who unsettle the mind and the faith. As you hope for Paradise, have you ever seen among Vaini's private books anything of a revolutionary character?'

"Monsignore, he possesses a volume entitled 'Revolutions of the Heavenly Bodies.'"

"Young man, you are an impudent fool. Had you been wise, you would have known that to be friends with me is more profitable than to be the dupe of a charlatan and the lover of a half-crazed girl. Begone—and sin no more. I shall keep an eye upon you, and at the slightest indiscretion . . . ."

It was two o'clock when I stood again in the Via St. Ufizio, free—and wiping from my brow the moisture of that anxious half-hour. To ascertain if I were followed, I walked to an unfrequented street near by, hastened down it, then faced about. Had the Dogger skulked at my heels, I should in that moment's excitement have been capable of doing him a mischief, but there was no one in sight. Vaini's lodging was doubtless under surveillance, but the greater his danger the more urgent that he be warned. I sprang into a passing fiacre and drove to Trinità dei Monti. The Professor's study was empty, and so, after knocking, I found his bedroom. I inferred that he had been summoned at the same time as myself, and was doubtless at that moment in the presence of

Monsignor Belti. And Hebe,—the hall door opened, and in came Hebe, having heard my step from her own room. I felt aggravated at the unconcern with which she listened to my breathless recital, till abruptly I spoke of what I conceived to be her own danger.

With gentle sadness she answered: "My only danger from the Holy Office is that which has befallen many women—to be taken to a convent and there remain. You may trust Gardullo to see to it that I am not thus removed from his reach."

Then, shaken by a sudden gust of passion, she exclaimed, with face in a crimson blaze: "Do you know why Gardullo wishes to marry me?—I am to be sold to his patron, the Prince of Messina. They have both dared tell me so, and offer me a palace."

How those great deep tragic eyes flashed as she added: "They are loathsome to me, one as the other. I am afraid of the illustrissimo Professor, and as for Signor Orion—he is too wise. You alone, Signorino, have been good. You care for me a little, though you have not said so. Hush! do not speak. I know what you would say. Is not silence the language of *Divino Amore*?"

I was startled and confused at the utterance of an emotion I had not suspected. Then the intense look faded and her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh," she sobbed, "I am so unhappy!" and at the words, heedlessly, our hands met. "What is the day worth if we always labour? Let us give our life to calm. Let us go away together," she whispered, in a voice like cadenced music. "Come, no matter whither, so it be where none can find us; come, ere youth be spent and our hearts grown heavy, and I will love you with the pagan love—for love's own sake."

Our hands had met; and how often in after years, walking through beautiful solitudes—and amid the scent of flowers and the song of birds remembering Hebe—how often have I asked myself, would it have been well for us if that handclasp had been for life?

I read the proud courage in her face, and found in myself heroic self-restraint to answer, "It would be foolhardy in you, Hebe—and wrong in me."

"Will you leave me to Gardullo?" she cried, seeing I dared not look my temptress in the eyes, her face so close to mine that as she spoke the soft black hair brushed against me.

The word stung me to fury. I had about me a dozen *louis d'or* and a French bank-note for a thousand francs, which I pressed into her hand. I dared not trust myself to linger. I was twenty-two, and before me stood a splendid being of life and love.

"Escape," I ejaculated, "at your own time and in your own way."

Then, turning my face from that delirious temptation, I rushed from the room. Never before had I realised what magnanimous courage it may require to run away.

IV.

During the week which ensued we were left unmolested. We had all, however, become so nervous and unsettled that study was discontinued, and Mr Marblehead agreed with me that it would be to our tutor's peace of mind if we both left Rome. The ill-will of the authorities might relax towards the Professor if his pupils withdrew from the Papal dominion. I therefore obtained the official *visa* to my passport, and called for a few thousand francs at my bankers' preparatory

to a summer in the Alps. Vaini had already betaken himself to his rural retirement, and thither Orion and I went for a day to take leave of him—and of Hebe.

We alighted at Rocca di Falco at the Ave Maria. Supper was immediately served, and we spent an hour in desultory conversation upon the existing political situation of Italy—little thinking that at that moment (May 1870) the Papal Government had but four months to live.

The Professor retired early, and Mr. Marblehead and I went out for a few minutes' contemplation of the stars and the sombre outline of the hills. I remember that the night was one of great darkness, to which, coming from the light of the dining-room, it was some moments before our eyes became accustomed. The new moon, Diana's slender crescent, was rising, and cast a faint shimmer upon Nemi. We walked in silence a few moments through the grove, when suddenly Orion, laying his hand lightly about my shoulder, said, "You and I have been good friends, and now we are about to part, perhaps never to meet again. In bidding you goodbye I wish to take you into my confidence—for to-morrow evening, by this time, I shall have disappeared."

"You will have disappeared?" I repeated in surprise.

"Yes, but not alone. Hebe Cesarano is coming with me."

The sting which those words inflicted is fresh and keen in my remembrance to this day. Rarely has a spoken word dealt me such pain. Had Hebe's declaration to me been mere deception? or, failing other means of escape from her betrothed and his patron, had she yielded at last to my companion's persuasion? I listened in a dull and angry stupor while he talked on.

"Yessir, I have never failed,—failure is against Nature, for Nature does not fail. Man fails only when he has not mastered the ways of Nature, or when he does not know how to handle his tools. I have had enough of Vaini and the psycho-psychical. Hebe has agreed to let down the gang-plank and ferry me to Elysium. I tell you she is a white alley, and I intend to make her live up to her label. After the honeymoon I shall put her on the stage, and the Dogger shall lurk around as the heavy villain. If he misbehaves I will knock him bald-headed. I shall make them both play up. I wanted to say all this right now, because by this time to-morrow—— Well, give me an hour's start, and——"

I did not hear the completion of the familiar phrase. While Orion spoke I became conscious, for all the blackness of the night, of a figure stealthily following from tree to tree. Suddenly I turned from my companion and rushed upon the intruder. But, at my first movement, whoever it was bounded away out of sight.

"What did you see?" inquired Mr. Marblehead.

"I saw Gardullo Mangicane," I answered, and bidding him good-night, sought the long wakeful hours I knew awaited me.

I was out next morning at an early hour, seeking in the refreshment of sunrise shadows and sunrise silence to efface something of the bitterness of the fevered night. It was a day of untroubled calm, and looking across the lake to the lilac-woven drapery covering the hillside, the eye roved over vistas of transcendent loveliness. A voluptuous breath of spring was in the air, for we were touching the heart of Maytime. The broadening day mellowed the silhouette of Monte Cavo, and where sunshine fell on lichen-stained wall and crumbling terrace the moss became luminous as gold in ancient tapestry. A filmy wood-smoke rose above Nemi, the humming-bees were tuning in the orchard, and I remember the air was sweet with odour of wild strawberries. Before me lay Diana's mirror, motionless and blue-green as shot silk, typical to my fancy of those springs and fountains of antiquity into which I had been dipping. Diana's silver mirror! . . .

that may have reflected the goddess standing knee-deep in its shallows—that men declare keeps her reflected image to this day. For the Immortals were always in their best attire, even when ungirdled for the bath, and their statuesque nudity is never immodest nor their raiment insufficient, though it be but a leafing vine.

Before me, at the water's edge, grew a willow of such brilliant green that it seemed almost yellow—the golden yellow of a flask of Episcopio. Beside it rose a great rock, and I halted in amaze at sight of the figure which stood beyond it, knee-deep, with uplifted arms as though to salute the sunrising. It was Diana in the living form of Hebe Cesarano, her beautiful white body looking like ivory—yet less a living woman than a charmed semblance. She did not see me hidden behind the rock in the shelter of which she had approached the water and beside which her clothing lay. Beneath the lustre of the bending willow she seemed a caryatide—a masterpiece of Grecian curves—a morsel for the gods. I lingered a breathless moment, and what man with love of woman in his blood will blame me! Here was the habit of the nude of ancient times that rose unabashed from the sea—that now bending launched like an out-bound prow and swam away into deep water—and with it departed the magic of a beauty which ever since, it seems to me, the living world has lost.

Thus was it once given me to behold a poet's dream, and that fugitive vision has remained with me through life. I have often revisited Nemi, and lingered in the wild-rose garden, and walked by the lake shore at the place where, on that morning, Hebe stood. The daffodils still scatter the hillside with their shower of gold. Against the rocks are the same trailing tapestries of moss, each at sunrise tipped with glistening dew. I walk through scenes delightfully familiar—yet removed from me by an immeasurable distance. A pulse of sadness floats across their tender beauty, when I remember the presence that once was their poetic charm. I shall never again behold her; but now Time, with a thrill akin to rich accords of music, weaves for me an exquisite witchery about those happy days.

I had promised to remain with Vaini until the following morning, and we spent several hours together in his study taking a retrospective survey of many philosophical subjects. He showed me his portfolio filled with original gleanings and scientific queries and curious problems in those fascinating realms of speculation wherein he was a master. Since his death that portfolio is in my possession, and on many a quiet afternoon I turn over its neat manuscript packets, which, in their variety and brilliancy, bear token to the range and activity of their author's mind.

After our midday repast of bean soup and fried sardines I went to reconnoitre the grove where, on the previous evening, I had missed tapping Gardullo's head with my stick. "He will skulk among these trees again to-night," I thought, examining the ground and its approaches. Then I remembered—"what matter if he come?—it can only be in quest of Hebe, and this evening she and Orion will be posting northward miles away."

I had no heart to talk with Hebe, nor had I aught further to say to Mr. Marblehead. I thought to leave them to their own contrivings, and so strolled to a little trellised arbour wreathed with wild grape-vines. The thought of Gardullo's spying presence led me to meditate upon the shapes and phantoms and fleeting spectres with which the ancients peopled their world. The Greeks and Romans can rarely have felt themselves wholly alone, for though they heard not the footfall . . .

Footfall! Yes, it was beside me, and there stood Hebe Cesarano, fixing me with great questioning eyes.

I motioned her to a seat. For nearly an hour we talked, and often I seek to remember the unselfish and endearing things then said. It was a last long rapturous leave-taking—for ever. Such farewells are rarely quite dry-eyed, but in those early days I knew nothing of such matters, and it was with astonishment I beheld Hebe's eyes dimmed with tears. I drew her close—to see, and perhaps hereafter the impulse of that wayward instant will be forgiven, since for both it was a kiss that meant good-bye.

"Hebe," I asked, "shall we ever lose our way in Paradise, or will the path always be clear, think you, that leads to those we love?"

She pointed to the sky overhead, where some brilliant birds were winging their swift undeviating course. "The birds will lead us to one another," she answered, "for we know that love follows their flight."

And with the word she sprang into the sunshine—the suave sunshine that softens so many griefs—and was gone.

All that afternoon I was oppressed with consciousness of impending danger. When supper-time came, Vaini and Madonna Cesarano were puzzled at the simultaneous disappearance of Orion Marblehead, Hebe and Facino. I was not so much surprised, and held my peace. The Professor and I sat down to his favourite *risotto*, followed by a *frittata*, and as the evening was chilly I persuaded him to drink a measure of Albano. He had devoted the afternoon to compiling the description of an excavation made in April under the cellar of a house on the Via Gotto, where he penetrated into the crypt within which in Roman days were entombed alive the Vestals who had sinned. It is written with his forceful brevity, and I never pass the Ministero delle Finanze, built some years later on that locality, without thinking of the gruesome substructure it covers. The crypt was intact, and has never since been visited; and Vaini dwells upon the ghastly horror which came over him as he descended the flight of stone steps down which those unhappy women went to their living tomb.

Presently we heard some one at the outer door. "It must be Orion or Hebe," exclaimed Vaini and Madonna Cesarano, and I followed them to see. The night was inky black. In the courtyard stood Facino, with a woman's dress and bonnet over his arm. He had been persuaded by his sister, so he said, to clothe himself at dark in one of her gowns, tie her bonnet and veil about his head, and seat himself beside Orion in the travelling carriage which waited near Genzano. They had not driven a mile when his identity was discovered; and then——

"And then?" we asked.

Then the Signore had caught him by the throat, dragged him out of the carriage, and kicked him across the road. "Beata Vergine! how the Americano swore!"

"But why were you in the carriage? and where is Hebe?" screamed his mother, shaking him furiously.

It was a family dispute, and discretion prompted me to stroll through the grove.

What happened immediately thereafter? There was a man's sudden outcry. Vaini, Madonna, and Facino came running to me, and together we cautiously made our way to where—flat on his back, with outstretched arms—lay Gardullo Mangiacane, speechless, fast losing consciousness, his chasseur jacket open and the blood oozing from a stab in his throat. He had been violently stilettoed, and whoever dealt the blow had vanished as by enchantment.

Who but Hebe could have wounded him?—in self-defence, of course.

"Passed through the gate that never closes"

Lanterns were brought and the leisurely police came from Genzano. There was much talking and many futile questions were asked and repeated.

"But what," still cried Madonna Cesarano, "has become of Hebe?"

"Whom the gods love die hard," whispered the Professor. "Hebe has stabbed him and thrown herself into the lake."

Madonna heard, and filled the air with lamentation.

"Hebe dead? Gone!—no further than from dawn to sunrise, but for ever. Dead! Aye, passed through the gate that never closes, and climbed the blossomed steps."

Early next morning we learned that Gardullo was not dangerously hurt. He had soon recovered consciousness, his throat had been dressed; in a day or two he might be able to speak, and then the truth would be known.

An hour later I bade Professor Vaini a grateful and affectionate farewell, drove to Rome for my luggage, and crossed the frontier of the Papal dominion that evening. A dozen years elapsed before I again beheld Italy.

Madonna Cesarano sleeps in the graveyard of Ariccia. I saw her once again, in 1883, the time-worn hands still busy, her hair turned white as the wool she was spinning. Facino, grown prodigiously fat, converted Rocca di Falco into an inn where, keeping up the brigand traditions of the family, he fleeces the sojourner.

More than once, in subsequent years, I spoke with Vaini about the events of that tragic evening. At first he declared Hebe's disappearance to be a case of suicide, affirming that her bones moulder in the depths of the lake. But on the last occasion I reverted to the subject he merely smiled and gazed out of the window with an amused expression.

In the winter of 1895 I drove from Rome to Isola Farnese, where an Etruscan tomb was to be opened. After its inspection I lingered to look at the church. A little old padre in rusty gown and berretta came out to salute me, in whose face was something familiar. Where had I seen those faded steel-grey eyes, those fine lips, and the small-pox mark on the right brow? It was Monsignor Beltà, voluble and unctuous, and still fingering his soutane. He was less favoured now with the gifts of Mammon, and seemed pleased when I invited him to sit in my carriage while the horses were harnessed, and share my luncheon of galantine and Irroy brut.

Suddenly addressing him by name, I said, "Monsignor Beltà, you and I have met before."

He looked at me intently, without recognition.

"May 1870—Professor Vaini—Hebe Cesarano," I murmured, watching him with malicious pleasure.

The glass fell from his hand.

"I will be more merciful than you were with me," I added, "and ask only one question. What became of Hebe?"

"Signore, she was but a girl—not twenty; and you, a friend of the wizard, know that the Olympians were all in their prime when they vanished—not one grown old or deaf or blear-eyed or imbecile. This was because they had a finer instinct than we to discern the poetry in life's ending."

"But what has this to do with Hebe?"

There was a twinkle of amusement in the steel-grey eyes as he answered, "Since you wish me to speak seriously, was she not one of them, and could she do less than they?"

This persiflage was so little convincing, that when a year later accident guided

me to the whereabouts of my former fellow-student, I wrote, presuming so far upon our acquaintance as to ask him the same question—what became of Hebe Cesarano? A week later I received the following extraordinary reply:—

"SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS,
"*April 13th*, 1896.

"DEAR SIR,—

"Your letter reminds me that twenty-six years ago you were as tender as I on that beautiful psychological problem. I never doubted it was your kind thought placed her brother in my carriage. And at this time of day it seems rather cool to ask what became of Hebe, when no one can answer that question so well as yourself.

"Yours very truly,
"ORION MARBLEHEAD.

"P.S.—How is your friend the Dogger?"

In the autumn of 1890, whilst traversing Eighth Avenue, in New York, I observed a man beating his dog. As the animal ran away, the man raised himself, and I recognised Gardullo Mangicane. Beside his shop-door was the familiar red-and-white striped pole, and the sign "*George Magician Tonsorial Artist*"

Thus was an Italian name Americanised, and thus had Hebe's *fiancé* become a thriving barber.

I paused before him, and said in Italian: "Judas, is that you?"

He glanced up with the old sinister look, recognised me, and rubbed his hands with fawning salutation.

"After twenty years," I said, "I am still in doubt as to the events of that evening. Have you ever discovered who attacked you?"

"Signorino," he answered, "if Paradise were opening before me and this were my last word upon earth, I would swear it was you struck me with a slender shining blade."

I turned on my heel, wondering what he and Mr. Marblehead could be thinking about. Not many days later I read this notice in the *Express*:—

"An Italian barber, named George Magician, living at 1754 Eighth Avenue, where he was much respected, lost his life yesterday while attempting to drown his dog in the Hudson River. Tying a cord round the animal's neck, and weighting it, Mr. Magician threw the dog from a boat, but in endeavouring to keep it under with a pole, overbalanced himself, fell overboard and was drowned. The dog escaped."

So perished the Dogger.

WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

"On some moss-grown fragments from the ruin of another world"

THE ORIGIN OF LIFE.

BY C. W. SALEEBY, M.D.

WITH PICTURES BY SIDNEY H. SIME.

AS we look round us, in street or country or where you please, we see objects which may be divided into two great classes. To the first belong houses, rocks and stones, whose is, as Wordsworth has it—

> The silence and the calm
> Of mute insensate things.

To the second belong such objects as men and sparrows, which have an apparent spontaneity and power of self-movement that sharply distinguish them from their inanimate surroundings. On much further consideration we find that it is necessary to include in the same class as men and birds a number of objects, mute and to all appearance insensate, which have no obvious power of self-movement, but are almost as stationary as the houses or the stones. These are trees, grass, shrubs, every form of vegetable life. They are not to be regarded as half-alive, or less endowed with vitality than the mobile bird and beast—which, indeed, owe their life entirely and directly to that of the green plant.

We have, then, an inanimate or inorganic, and a living or organic world around us. Now, if we take a crystal or a brick, we can trace its history with ease. It is simply an aggregation of smaller particles arranged in a more or less symmetrical way. No question of parentage arises. But if we consider an oak or a horse, we are assured that it has had very small beginnings, that no human hands have formed it, that the beginnings were invariably and necessarily derived from some former oak or horse: no oak, no acorn. Nor do we doubt that every human being on the earth has had parents—was not formed directly from mother-earth. Now, this belief of ours may not have been consciously extended by us to lower forms of life: we may never have considered whether every mushroom implies a preceding mushroom, every bacillus a preceding bacillus. We may even be inclined to think that if a cheese be left in a damp cupboard, mould will appear upon it by a spontaneous generation from the substance of the cheese: that though every man must

have had parents, the same is hardly true of a mere mould.

But, as a matter of fact, men of science have entered exhaustively into this question, and they most positively assert, without any qualification of the smallest, that what is true of the man is true of the mould. It also has had its parents like unto itself, and did not spontaneously develop from the cheese. We have framed various Latin dogmas on this matter—dogmas of great historical and immediate interest. The illustrious Harvey, greatest physiologist of any age, made a great contribution to this question—a contribution which would keep green his name had he not been the discoverer of the circulation of the blood. Harvey spent many an hour in preparation for his great treatise "Concerning Generation," and concluded that *omne vivum ex ovo*: he found what corresponded to an egg-stage in the history of all the living things he examined. With the microscope, and especially its employment in the nineteenth century, the dogma of Harvey has been modified—it being the custom to modify scientific dogmas in accordance with new truth: a custom which is found more convenient than that of retaining the old form and giving it a new meaning.

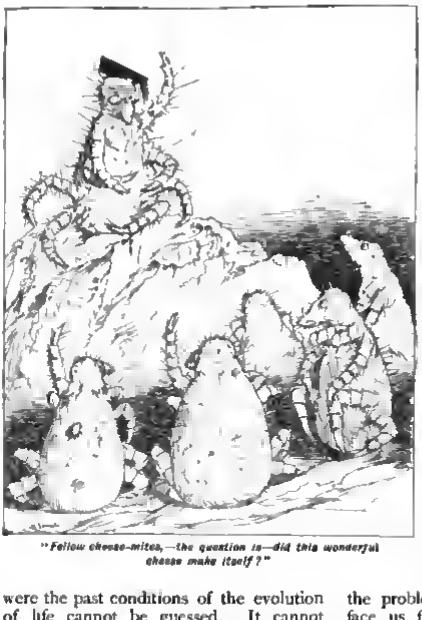
Rudolf Virchow, the founder of cellular pathology—that is, of modern pathology—modified Harvey's phrase in accordance with his own researches, and propounded it in this form—*omnis cellula e cellula*. It was thought that every living thing consists of cells; but it is at least probable that the very lowest and simplest form of living matter is not even so far evolved as to possess cellular form, so it is best to read our dogma in this form—*omne vivum ex vivo*. Under no conditions can all the (dead) cheese in the world produce one single unit of living matter. Such is the assertion to which only one dissentient is known amongst men of science at the present day. Of course I must assign the reasons which have led to the formulation and acceptance of this dogma; but before doing so I must just enumerate, as if no dogma had yet been framed, the possibilities as to the origin of life on this planet. The possible theories are three, with a semi-jocular one thrown in. In the first place, it is possible that the minutest and simplest forms of living matter are being constantly produced, wherever the conditions are suitable, to-day as yesterday, and ever since the temperature of the earth's surface was cool enough to permit of the presence

The chemist

of water in its liquid form. This doctrine is in harmony with the laws of continuity and of evolution, which are the most universal and invaluable of all modern conceptions. It is supported by the fact that the earth is everywhere flooded with the lowest forms of life. But, as we have seen, the prevailing scientific belief is a denial of this possibility.

On the contrary, this theory asserts that, *at the present day*, every living thing must have living progenitors—*omne vivum ex vivo*. This assertion is, of course, immediately faced with the necessity of stating how the first living thing—the veritable mother of all living—came to inhabit this planet. The overwhelming majority of biologists believe that *omne vivum ex vivo* was not always true. They find themselves compelled to aver that, though living cannot now be produced from inanimate matter, yet in the distant past the conditions must have been so different that life was naturally evolved upon the earth, by the continued play of continuous, unexceptionable, uninterrupted, unaided law. "Supposing a

planet carved from the sun, and revolving round the sun at a distance equal to that of our earth, would one of the consequences of its refrigeration be the development of organic forms? I lean to the affirmative." So said Tyndall, and so say we all—or nearly all—to-day. What



"Follow cheese-mites,—the question is—did this wonderful cheese make itself?"

were the past conditions of the evolution of life cannot be guessed. It cannot have been that a high temperature was needed, for the temperature must have been below that of the boiling point of water. The (supposed) difference between that distant period—perhaps a hundred million years ago, on one of Lord Kelvin's estimates—and the present, cannot have been due to any present deficiency of suitable complex chemical stuffs to-day. On the contrary, the earth is filled with complex compounds, proteids, carbo-hydrates and so forth, apparently ready to develop into living matter; yet (it is said) they do not: whilst living matter, containing all these bodies, was evolved in the past, when none of them was already there to aid in the process! It is a hard belief.

Thirdly, there is the belief of Lord Kelvin, who is not a biologist, but is assuredly the greatest living man of science, that no explanation of the origin of life is conceivable save that which refers it to the special act of a personal God. To use the great physicist's own words, "Science absolutely demands Creative Power." Lord Kelvin's recent expression of opinion on this thought raised a storm of protest from the biologists, not one of whom came to his support.

The semi jocular theory to which I have referred we owe to Lord Kelvin himself, who suggested, many years ago, that the first germs of life might have been brought to the earth, long æons ago, "on some moss-grown fragments from the ruins of another world." It is a brilliant effort of the scientific imagination, but I do not fancy that Lord Kelvin could now be regarded as taking it seriously. Even were we assured that meteorites are derived from the ruins of other worlds, and not from the ruins of comets, as the astronomers have excellent reason to believe; and even if we knew that, during their passage through our atmosphere, such meteorites were not necessarily raised to such temperatures as would effectually sterilise them,—yet the problem of the origin of life would face us from some planet of the past, if not from our own "lukewarm bullet" of to-day.

No: the present controversy is between the first two hypotheses: either life is arising ubiquitously now, by what Stevenson called a "vital putrefaction of the dust", or it arose, by a natural evolution, in the distant past, once and for all.

The *controversy*, I say: but it is almost universally believed that there is no controversy. *Omne vivum ex vivo* is taken as finally proved, as a result of the great controversy of thirty years ago, in which Tyndall, Huxley, Pasteur, and Dr. Bastian engaged. It is thought that the "myth of spontaneous generation" has been for ever refuted, and *omne vivum ex*

vivo for ever established. This is what I was taught, not so many years ago, in class-rooms both of zoology and botany; and it is so taught everywhere. But lately the matter has come up again: Sir Oliver Lodge and Professor Ray Lankester have fought a drawn battle in the *Times*; and Dr. Bastian has published a remarkable book, and made most important contributions to *Nature*, and we may appropriately ask ourselves what was really proved thirty years ago. It was shown, beyond dispute, that when infusions of hay, or other substances which customarily came to swarm with life in a few days, were efficiently boiled, and then protected from contamination, no life ever developed in them. The boiling had killed every germ of life in the infusion; and for evermore it must remain dead, unless living germs were brought to it from outside: *vivum* could only be *ex vivo*, spontaneous generation was a myth.

Now let us see how this view, the scientific orthodoxy of to-day, agrees with the opinions of the past. We shall find that, however difficult it may be to hold when we ask the origin of the *first* living things, yet it is perfectly compatible with the wisdom of past biology.

Inspired by a casual phrase in Lucretius about "falling atoms," the illustrious German-Scot, Immanuel Kant, just a century and a half ago (1755), conceived what is now known to every one as the nebular theory, which asserts that the Solar System has been evolved from a nebula—a cloud of gas such as, though much smaller than, you may see to-night in the Sword of Orion. When, in its turn, the embryo earth was cast off from this nebula and began to cool, there came a time when the water, till then filling the atmosphere in the form of vapour, was precipitated and formed the oceans. The famous Comte de Buffon thought that life probably began in the ocean—probably in the Polar oceans, which would be the first to cool; and, only the other day, an ingenious Frenchman traced a resemblance between our body-fluids—as to saline composition, etc.—and sea-water, thus lending some colour to his great countryman's hypothesis.

Then, when Herbert Spencer framed that theory of universal evolution which is now the master-key of all thinking, he found it necessary to consider this question of the origin of life, and made a valuable contribution to it; but he accepted the current biological teaching that life is not *now* evolved from inanimate matter.

Charles Darwin, when he proved the possibility of the origin of species of plants and animals by natural selection, began by assuming the existence of a "few simple forms" of living matter, and never discussed the question of their origin, which was outside his province.

Professor Haeckel, the loud dogmatiser of Jena, has a carbon-theory of the origin of life which, as far as I know, is supported by no one but himself and his non-scientific admirers. He also is content to accept the doctrine that life cannot now originate from inanimate matter. The supposed occurrence, in the far past, of this evolution was termed by Dr. Charlton Bastian *Archebiosis*, but Huxley's less satisfactory term *Abiogenesis* has been preferred, doubtless owing to the great and greatly deserved fame of its inventor.

Now it is true that boiled fluids, uncontaminated, will remain sterile indefinitely. It is also true that, under the conditions which they set themselves, our experimenters have completely failed to manufacture life in the laboratory. At best, the most successful followers of M. Berthelot, the great founder of synthetic chemistry, can only manufacture the very simplest forms of proteid or albuminous matter, and this by use of temperatures and effort of which no need is manifested by living nature.

Furthermore, it is true that if a hay infusion, for instance, be passed through a Pasteur-Chamberland or Berkefeld filter, which excludes even the minutest of known living organisms, the filtered fluid will remain sterile as long as it is uncontaminated. In so far, this experiment goes to confirm the results obtained by boiling, and the whole question seems closed.

Thirty years ago Dr. Charlton Bastian, F.R.S., was amongst what appeared and still appears to be the defeated party. He believed in spontaneous generation. But other duties claimed him, and his ultimate silence was taken for conviction. He had published important books, with many drawings made by himself, illustrating what he asserted that the microscope had revealed to him. People shrugged their shoulders, and hinted at the value of imagination in guiding the

pencil. Dr. Bastian bided his time. Finally he resigned his professorship at University College Hospital, five years before he need, learnt the difficult art of photographing under the microscope, and has since taken with his own hands more than five thousand photo-micrographs, which bear, directly or indirectly, upon the origin of life. The most striking of all his observations—one which he has again and again repeated—was embodied by him in a paper which he sent to the Royal Society, of which he is a distinguished Fellow. Not only was the paper refused, but a well-known member of the

They most positively assert, without qualification of the smallest.

Committee responsible for its refusal actually refused point blank to move three yards in the library of the Royal Society to see Dr. Bastian's specimens.

Now let us consider first Dr. Bastian's criticism of the experiments in which fluids are boiled or filtered. He reasonably regards it as necessary for the production of life that certain chemical compounds be present. If it can be shown that boiling *destroys* these compounds, then the boiling experiment cannot be held to prove that life cannot originate in non-living fluids. It is known that boiling does alter or "degrade" the chemical compounds in the boiled fluid. It might be thought that, if boiling be not performed, but merely filtering through a germ-proof filter, the result (the non-development of life) would be conclusive; but it has been shown that such filtration alone suffices to alter the chemical nature of the filtered fluid. "Spontaneous generation" is not, therefore, proved to be a myth even by this experiment. So much for destructive criticism.

But Dr. Bastian has also positive results to offer. He has seen, he tells me, the development, in a previously clear fluid, of minute black spots, which gradually enlarge, and at last become *motile bacteria*. This change cannot successfully be recorded; but it seems to be not inconceivable that a cinematographic apparatus might be adjusted to the microscope, and thus demonstrate, beyond all cavil, the evolution which Dr Bastian declares that he has seen.

But here I must refer to perhaps the most remarkable photograph that Dr. Bastian has taken. It represents the spines, magnified 700 times, of a minute water animal known as the Cyclops. In these spines, which are absolutely impervious to the smallest known organisms, there develop a number of spots, which finally are recognisable as bacteria. This the photographs clearly show—though they are too minute to reproduce here. Either these bacteria have arisen *de novo* in the tissue of the spine, or they are the enlarged forms of some bacteria, hitherto unknown, which are too small for the microscope to detect—are ultramicroscopic — and which have somehow made their way through the tough covering of the spine. But this is pure hypothesis, without a shadow of proof, and to assert it, simply because you decline to believe that the bacteria can have arisen *de novo* in the spine, is not science, but prejudice. It remains for those who deny that the bacteria can have arisen *de novo*—since this would clash with their dogma—to prove that such ultra-microscopic bacteria do exist, and can force their way into the spine of the Cyclops,—or else

to admit that their dogma is unproved.

A second photograph illustrates a similar

The gate of knowledge

evolution of bacteria—parentless bacteria—in the cells of a potato. Of course, in both of these cases, the bacteria arise in tissue that is already organic; but, if they can so arise, we must cease to hold the accepted belief that the bacteria of to-day have all descended from bacterial ancestors which were present on the earth scores of millions of years ago.

The easiest and most natural belief, according with the law of continuity and

with all known analogies, is that life still arises on the earth by natural processes. Harmonising with this belief of Dr. Bastian's—or at any rate conflicting with Lord Kelvin's—is a recent paper by Professor Pickering, who finds excellent reason to believe that there are upon the moon traces of the action of vegetation. Now, the moon was certainly born from the earth when she was far too hot to sustain life; so that, if Professor Pickering be right, living matter has spontaneously developed on the moon. Surely no one will suggest any exercise of a deliberate Creative Act so apparently purposeless as the formation of living vegetation on the surface of the moon.

Of course all this conflicts with the popular notion of the Eternal Power. But, on the other hand, it perfectly consorts with the philosophic conception of the Etemal who sustains and informs all things. Suppose that all the phenomena of stars and suns, of life and of mind, be reduced, beyond dispute, to the Law of Continuity: suppose that we can explain not only life itself, but even the genesis of such as these, its noblest products,—can we escape from the overwhelming consciousness of the Eternal and Eternally Creative Power "from which all things proceed"? Assuredly not: he who has some conception of the Eternal as nearly adequate as the poor human mind can form, will be no whit disturbed to learn that Dr. Bastian is right, or—some day—that life can be manufactured at will in the laboratory, for pray how would such manufacture exclude or deny or derogate from the ineffableness of the Power that "rolls through all things"?

Science

I

IN May 1875, while reading law in New York, I received a letter from Professor Vaini urging me to meet him in London during the following month for an experiment of extreme importance. He called it "A Glimpse behind the Veil," and I was surprised to infer that he was bent upon a hunt for buried treasure. He mentioned a Roman Votive Spring, and avowed the purpose of penetrating a field mapped only by conjecture. "Come at once," he added, "do not hesitate or delay, and together we will hear the rustle of unloosing wings."

I had been in correspondence with Vaini ever since my Roman studies five years previously,* and to-day, turning over his memoranda written during those intervening years, I note with interest that his multitudinous activities had brought him to the verge of discovering the origin of the ordinary elements at whose threshold scientific research is now trembling. I need not say that I was flattered at being invited to share a purpose of Vaini's vivid and illuminating life. I longed to renew with him my investigation of psychical phenomena, and immediately arranged to take my two months' holiday in England. Before me lie Vaini's jottings upon our adventure, and I shall use them to supplement my recollection of that enchanted garden which thirty years ago was Yesterday. It is my aim to write a restrained narrative of our experience, as to which it has always been my belief that Vaini and I grazed the confines of a world beyond our own. If I seem to presume upon my readers' indulgence, it should be remembered that the truth is sometimes evolved from facts in themselves incredible.

When we met in London, he explained the scope and aim of our quest. Like a true artist he loved his leisure, and I listened for an hour while he painted his scheme as only one can do who realises the atmosphere of thought. It was always a delight to follow his method, for his phrases were of the diamond edition. He believed that from Moses and the prophets the greatest things have been accomplished by self-illuminating light, and now drew the outline of his project boldly, leaving it to Time, his fellow-worker, to fill in accessories. From youth alone against the world, Vaini had entered the arena as it were with no weightier battalion than a set of intellectual chessmen—a tiny *corps d'élite*—yet at

* See PALL MALL MAGAZINE of December 1904.

his touch so animated with supernatural prowess, that when marshalled against earthly forces, the array seemed not unequal. His inductions were reflected by many mental mirrors; and of all men I have known, none possessed in an equal degree the art of captivating imagination. His finest inferences rested upon an anticipation of that belief in universal symmetry which in our own time Science is demonstrating to be the fundamental truth.

He began by reminding me of the half dozen Votive Springs thus far discovered in Italy. Students of Roman archæology are familiar with the custom which prevailed from remote antiquity of casting offerings into such lakes or springs as were held sacred, and especially into those whose hygienic properties attracted invalids. Whoever wished to propitiate the deity, or give thanks for a cure, threw into the water according to his means. The discovery of a Votive Spring, which is usually the result of accident, is an event of great numismatic importance. At the top will be found the opulent offerings of Imperial days in a layer of gold coins of the Cæsars. Beneath lie silver vessels and moneys of the Republic. Under this rests a mass of copper and brass—coin, graven figures and kitchen utensils. Lastly is uncovered a bed of flints and arrowheads, the offerings of the prehistoric elect.

"It is well known," continued Vaini, "that a Votive Spring of immense antiquity existed at Aquæ Sulis, the modern Bath. When Titus founded there the colony which by reason of its warm mineral waters he named Aquæ Calidæ, the settlers found a local deity whom they seem to have accepted as the genius of the place. I spent a week at Bath last summer, comparing the references of ancient writers with its topography, and in the Museum I observed a tablet engraved:

FLAVIÆ EPICHA(RIDI) SACER(DOTIÆ).
DEÆ VIRGINIS CELESTI(S)
"*To Flavia Epicharis, a priestess of the Celestial Virgin.*"

"Observe that this Virgo Celestis can be no other than the Carthaginian Astarte whose worship was introduced by Phœnician traders at a time when Britain was unknown to Rome."

"Have you any knowledge as to the whereabouts of this spring?" I asked.

"I have placed it within the surface of an acre," answered Vaini. "Curiously, it is at a mathematical point on the hillside where the shadows of yesterday's sunset and to-day's sunrise meet."

"Were this treasure found," I objected, "the Government would snatch it from you."

"The Government," he answered with feverish intensity, "cannot snatch the credit of the most remarkable archæological discovery of the century in England.'

"But you are not even sure there was a Votive Spring."

"Its existence," said the Professor, "is established by the writing of Sulpicius Arens, a Roman priest who perished in the destruction of Aquæ Sulis, and who some years previously addressed a letter to the Flamens of the Celestial Virgin in other lands. He tells his colleagues that, upon the rising of the Britons, the Spring will be buried. He defines its position with reference to the river, the city wall, and the Vicus Sacri Fontis."

"Dear Master, you seem very familiar with Aquæ Sulis?"

"Yes, for I possess one of the three existing copies of the writing of Sulpicius—the work of a monkish hand, which in 1499 Ormès discovered in a mutilated condition, pasted in the leaves of a great Psalter."

I knew that Vaini's mind was an instrument so keen and adaptable, so expert

in opening intellectual paths, as to be adequate even to a fantastic achievement. The next day found us established at a little inn beside the Avon, on the outskirts of Bath, which for more than a century had borne the name of Castle Joyous. My companion had hired it for a month, knowing that we should find there greater freedom and privacy than at the fashionable "Pump" The first I saw of Castle Joyous was its peaked roof splashed with emerald moss. Its walls were two feet thick and its roof-beams black as ebony. Beside the house was a little old garden—a tangle of crystal roses that even in their abandonment amid great edgings of box would have pleased the most learned rosarian. Looking thence into the sparkling Avon, one might behold disused stepping-stones beneath the water and fancy on them the noiseless footfalls treading to and fro. Who could say they might not lead half way to our imagined goal!

Mrs. Oldcorn served for me a supper of grilled bones and a bottle of the Espiritu Santo sherry I had brought from London, and a "Hamlet of eggs" for Vaini. His diet was limited to fish, eggs and vegetables, and I had so far brought myself to conform to his abstemiousness that, after finishing my steak or chop, I usually shared his brain building food. Our landlady was one of the listless-eyed and tired cattle of her class, and a liberal consumer of the boiled mutton which thirty years ago figured upon English tables. "Brave and 'artsome, that's what I am," and might have added close hauled on week-days, till on Sunday afternoons she acquired what sailors call a list to port.

The next morning, breakfasting upon Stargazer pie, which is fish pasty, with the heads of the fish peeping through the crust, Vaini and I addressed ourselves to the serious features of our undertaking. "It is true," he began, "that if touched by a calculation of absolute nicety, the hiding place may disclose itself, as a heart wrung by intense emotion reveals its secret. The doors of knowledge are sometimes opened by the simplest key. On the other hand, our search for this ton of gold, which I have come to regard as my reversionary heritage, may be dangerous. Your real artist," he added, producing a curious mechanical appliance, "does not work with borrowed tools; and after prolonged experiment, I have constructed this revolving drill of the finest steel, with a receptacle behind the point. Its boring power into the earth is only six feet, but in my belief the upper crust of the treasure must be nearer the surface, and my apparatus has the advantage of being so compressible that it can be carried under the arm like a telescope. But what is of first importance is that we guard against that same agency which has played havoc with so many searchers."

"We are not the first, then, in this bed of nettles?"

"No. Sulpicius Arens tells his colleagues that attempts were made during the reigns of Constantine, of Julian, and of Valentinian—all violently frustrated by the Virgo Celestis in the semblance of a swarthy girl. In 1212 an Italian prelate named Marsilio Sarpi, visiting the Norman Cathedral of Bath, explored the fragments of the Roman Aquæ Sulis. He was fascinated and debauched by a beautiful dark girl, and being seized with remorse, became smitten with madness. In 1505 Ormès, the renowned soothsayer of the Borgias, invited his Venetian rival Almodoro to go with him into Britain, and the latter tells the story of what befell. Measuring and digging amid crumbling vestiges, the daughter of their hostess, a sombre-visaged young woman, confided to Ormès that at a particular locality then still called Vicus Sacri Fontis, the water oozed from the ground. Thither one night she conducted them, with the result that Almodoro was violently stabbed, he knew not by whom, and Ormès left dead by the roadside smitten as with the club of Hercules. The Bishop of Bath caused

Almodoro to be cared for; and the dusky maiden having disappeared, her mother's tongue was torn out and her arms and limbs crushed—after which it was discovered that she was not the girl's mother.

My companion had given me material for reflection, and I strayed away for an hour's thought in the garden. There was an orchard beyond, its blossoms still sparkling with dew, and on the hill-slopes stretched billowy masses of chestnut bloom. At my feet were feathergrass and cornmaidens and Turk's-cap tulips. It was a brilliant day, and across the meadows and against the forest the advancing sunlight was spreading its eager fingers. I remember thinking it is on such a morning we are made to feel that Nature alone has never lost the strength and beauty of its childhood. There was the swift and rippling music of bird-notes in the air, and I knew that so long as birds shall make music the heart will be glad. Were they too filling the tree-tops with some delightful message, some consciousness of an unseen yet thrilling possession such as the ancients comprehended in dedicating their groves and springs? Suddenly the bird music ceased, and in that instant's hush I seemed to hear the eloquent silence speak, and became vividly aware of a presence behind me. I turned with a strange heart-spasm,—and there, in the open doorway through which I had passed, stood a dark girl, a splendid flash of sunlight in her eyes. At the sight something within me caught fire. To this day I can see the statuesque poise of her body and the black coils of her braided hair and the silken threat of her haunted eyes, unafraid and unflinching.

Yet what had caused me this emotion was but a tawny young woman, with great twists of soft hair, habited in a flamingo-red bodice, a striped green skirt, and here and there a fringe of white. She was leaning forward, watching me with the mystery of a sleeping passion. The wild thought flashed upon me that here was a repetition of the fateful force whereby, through centuries, every comer had been smitten and baffled. Was hers a face I had seen before, or only dreamt of? It was a sad face, as though weird memories crouched in its twilight. And musing upon the danger thus suddenly sprung into being, I wondered how one thus strangely summoned from remote and half fabulous regions would fare in a tragical collision with Vaini.

I walked towards her, looking beyond her face and the shining gold coin that hung at its side—seeking to reach the mind of eager devices and desires. And instinctively the cry sprang to my lips. "You here ... already!"

At the words she startled with a flush of amorous colour, like some strange being that for the first time hears the human voice. Then, in a murmur wherein it seemed familiar accents lingered, she answered:

"Yes, it is I. Did you not hear me calling?"

II

I lost no time in seeking Vaini in his room, where he sat before a map of Bath marked 1690. Between his fingers was the familiar green pencil with which in a jesting moment he once told me he did his mental indexing. I knew he was busy weighing the evidence of an unseen and half-forgotten world, and remember wondering at the moment whether within an Archimedes of purely intellectual force there must yet linger something earthly—the flying eagle's shadow skimming the ground.

"Professor," I abruptly ejaculated, seeing that he anticipated my ill news, "I have beheld our traditional and inexorable enemy. I verily believe" I added,

"There, in the open doorway through which I had passed stood a dark girl"

sinking into a chair, her words still ringing in my ears, "that we have before us no mere human potency."

"It is true,' he replied, with his invariable suavity, "that this Pandora Miduvel is the historic dusky girl"

"You already know her name!" I exclaimed.

"I saw her yesterday, when I too divined the meaning that looks from that face. I sent for Mrs. Oldcorn, and with my imperfect English learned something of this strange niece of hers—if relative indeed she be. For all her gipsy ways, she is a young woman of education But, caro mio, you seem troubled. You would not falter when already we stand within the enemy's lines. It cannot be doubted that a fantastic treasure lies at our feet. My effort for its recovery shall be a symphony in colour, a sonnet in porcelain, a classic of its kind." On this map I have traced the lost course of the Vicus Sacri Fontis Sulpicius gives ingeniously the point of meeting of two lines, one a prolongation of the western city wall, the other drawn from a point on the river From that intersection to the Votive Spring in Roman paces is, he says, *a lily, a cabbage, and an apple added together.* You follow the meaning?"

"Alas, dear Master, I follow neither his meaning nor yours"

"For the first time in our studies," replied Vaini, "I am disappointed in you. The most superficial observer of Nature knows that plants, flowers and fruits are constructively formed upon numbers. Thus the botanical key of a lily is 6; in most grasses it is 3, in apples, pears and roses, 5; while all cruciferous vegetables, such as turnips and cabbages, are formed on the ground plan of 2's and 4's. Hence the lily, the cabbage and the apple of Arens give the Roman numerals VI., IV., V, which added together make fifteen Roman paces, and this distance agrees with a point at which a line drawn from the river crosses a prolongation of the western city wall half way up the slope of Lansdowne Hill"

"To me, Professor, it all sounds like unravelling the crimson heart of a rose, or like polishing running water."

"Water!" eagerly echoed the wise man. "how many philosophers have caught golden fish in that same water! Think how often Science has kindled its flame at an alchemist's sparkling vision. But enough . . . success means a wreath of immortal renown."

"It may mean a bullet through the brain," I added.

"What matter that we stumble, if we climb!" retorted my tutor, with a cheerful nod "Would you not rather pace the deck than be a stowaway? Yours," he added, softening his Italian utterance to a whisper—"shall be the condensed cream of this adventure You shall have a summerful of love. You have asked more than once why I sought your co-operation Your part shall be to excite a sentimental interest in the brown girl, and lure her from the compass of my operations. I must have time and elbow-room"

"Shy as I am, and maladroit with the sex . . ."

"It is only a bad workman," he interrupted, "that finds fault with his tools You have long been on easy terms with the deeper emotions, and now you will attack at once, remembering that in life, as in chess, the prize is with him who seizes and keeps the move. Do not let your initiative lack powder: strike once—through the heart. Above all, watch the under-current of this dangerous girl's thoughts, for herein, very possibly, your life will depend."

"Professor," I asked, "what am I to get for all this?"

"Friend of my soul, you shall have the sprig of Ivy that Ladas died to reach!"

"Maestro," I murmured, after a pause, "would it displease you if I took the next train back to London?"

Vaini's face clouded at the words "I should not have supposed it possible," he answered, in a voice of pained surprise, "that my favourite pupil could thus chagrin me twice within an hour. How can you tremble thus before fly-blown fears, when a fixed belief in oneself may touch even mediocrity like yours with that spark which to this day fires the intellectual Tenth Legion—the indomitable few?"

Accustomed as Vaini was to win men and bend them to his purpose, he would not believe that his pupil might not sway this wild girl's will. He declared that, schooled as I had been by him to scientific illusion, and habituated to

I lost no time in seeking Vaini in his room, where he sat before a map of Bath marked 1890

calculations as subtle as the witchery that breaks or mends a human heart, I would have over Pandora the same advantage intellectually that a chess-player would possess who employed an original opening of superior force. He urged me to look at the situation historically, analysing the mainspring of accomplished fact and putting wholly away that muttering in our sleep we call philosophy. "In my own experience," he added, gazing retrospectively out of the open window, "I have made it a point on occasions such as this to grasp the thrill of conscious strength which illumines the drama of life. It is the Italian manner, and results in action as pure and fine as the draped figure of romantic Music. The apples of knowledge are sour, yet I require of you but a single warm-hearted moment, believing as I do that anything can be done in a world where crooked grows faster than straight."

In the days that followed I never saw Pandora Miduvel without speculating upon the attributes our fancy had lent her, and asking myself whether an impress of some remote century might linger in the mind, as the murmur of long silent waves clings to the ocean shell. Could it be that ripples set in motion by the Ark still send a tremulous impulse across the expanse of things we muse upon? May the consciousness be so supernaturally quickened that a transmitted whisper is distinguishable across the soundless dark of ages?

Once—fallen thus into sun dreams—I loitered an hour amid the crystal roses, listening to the immortal talking of the river as the moving vision of its fluid panorama splashed and eddied over the water-worn stones

"I divine your thought," cried Pandora, coming towards me with a smile of magnetic fascination "You are thinking that the babble of a stream is a changeless voice, speaking for ever with the same meaning" Then absently she added, "When I listen, a fancy brings before me that which I have never seen—*a place of breaking waves*."

"And have you always lived," I inquired, "in this old-world atmosphere of peace called Bath?"

"Yes, since my uncle died, five years come Twelfth Night. In his prime he was the best wormeater in England"

"Wormeater! . . ." I repeated.

"One that bores worm-marks in new-made furniture to sell for old. It is an artist's trade—though he loved life as well as art. Look," she continued, leading me to the dining-room, where, on the reverse of a framed cardboard, ornamented with the familiar invocation of a "blessing on our home," the departed wormeater had traced the legend:

Irish Whiskey, English Beef,
A Welsh Rabbit and a Scotch Girl

"My aunt is not Scotch," added the dark maiden, with ripples of mirth

At the end of a week Vaini and I had sufficiently reconnoitred our ground, and the next night was appointed when we should sink the treasure-shaft of his invention. Once at the locality on Lansdowne hillside which he identified with the vanished Spring, I had watched him drawing a web of lines and curves and dotted figures so carefully based upon the sun's rays, as to be evidently an astronomical calculation. We were to take our valets with us and station them out of sight of our operations, yet near enough to protect us against surprise Vaini was unarmed, but I carried a pocket five chambered Colt, throwing an eight-ounce ball thirty paces.

As the night was to be one of fatigue, I resolved to spend the morning strolling at the edge of a forest called Withering Leaves, where in those days grew handfuls of wild flowers In the early hours, gazing from my window upon the vaporous cloud of pink and yellow blossoms that made the day seem cut in pearl, I had heard Pandora singing with marvellous finesse a popular refrain,—a song of rare pathos, and sweet as the melody of waking birds,—and now, as the sunshine broadened, what could I do save let my thoughts drift with the song? As I walked it seemed to me the world was filled with such faint sounds as minstrelsy is made of Once, across the luminous green, a cloud shadow flitted, as though some birding presence, driving the sunlight, sped upon vanishing wings I had reached the crest, and turned to look across grey manor garths upon the Avon, gliding down its smooth pavement towards the city's stair of climbing roofs,

when amid the tufts of meadowsweet and feather hyacinths I observed three twigs laid together in a triangle.

I was scrutinising this familiar gipsy signal, when the sound of voices hurtling through the forest reached me—the shrill defiance of a woman, the angry scolding of a man. Before I could catch more than a few words they issued from the trees.

"I speak for our people; my word is the voice of all," cried the man.

"Hideling," answered the girl, "speak again and I will leave my mark on you broad and deep!"

Then, at sight of me, both were silent. The woman was Pandora Miduvel, and from his face of bronze I took the man to be an English gipsy. He was roughly habited in what his vernacular would have styled "Kersemere kickseys" or breeches, a waistcoat of faded tomato red, a rusty velveteen jacket and cap, and about his neck a "blue hilly" kerchief—an ornament in vogue amongst those who devote their leisure to the technique of the poacher's art. In appearance he was a bulldog of the human breed, and I divined that he was one of the Celestial's underlings. He glanced doubtfully towards her, while she stood intently watching me, with lips pursed in a silent whistle. Was she considering whether to set her bulldog upon me? If so, the thought passed, for, motioning him back, she advanced with a salutation of suppressed amusement. She walked as light of foot as a fawn, and carried her sun-browned head like a flower. In her face was the exuberance of country life, and in place of the sweet-apple bloom of an English girl her dusky skin glowed with the fire of Egypt. About her hung a fascination not of the visible world, an impression heightened by the gold coin which dangled and sparkled beside her face. As she approached she laughed with semblance of good humour, yet that little laugh sounded weird as a song-thrush singing in December.

"I wonder at finding you followed by so unsavoury a companion," I said.

"Only buying mushrooms," she answered, showing me a basketful of creamy fungi.

"Perhaps you will tell me, as before, that you were waiting for me and calling my name?"

"I was telling my cousin Kushto Macromengro I will not marry him. When the same thing has been asked and refused a dozen times, what wonder if the voice be raised?"

"Very true. I might have known that those harsh cries could be none other than the accents of a love fed upon bitter herbs. Poor Kushto, he already tastes his cup filled with the lees of other men's revelling."

"Other men's revelling!" she repeated; "that means another man's love." And as we walked she paused with wistful face, wherein some amorous thought gathered, as may hover a fancy of incomparable music about the silent harp, that waits—its strings unsmitten.

"Do you think you would ever grow to care for me?" she asked, with the heedless curiosity of a child.

The oddity of her question recalled the Hebrew declaration, *Man loveth the woman that is a stranger*—a judgment so true that, possessed as I was by a gruesome dread of my new acquaintance, I nevertheless felt within me the power of her charm.

"I have but to look in your face," I answered, "to know that you would prefer me to a hideaway poacher. Something tells me you have a purpose in life—dangerous it may be—who can say!"

"How do you know that?" she asked, with fixed attention.

"I have seen heads like yours on canvas," I replied, "wherein lay a passionate romance with interwoven ambitions and jealousies. Heads of famous people, whereon is the haunted look of unspeakable memories, whose thought is trained to scrutiny of every hour, not knowing what danger the next may bring."

But she scarcely listened, and interrupted me, saying: "Why were you following me, and how did you know I was here?"

"I was looking," I answered, amused at this characteristic inquiry, "for something else than a lovers' quarrel. My companion seeks a spot on the hillside where in ancient days, when people very different from us lived here, a young girl like you was put to death. There were splendid Roman soldiers in those days, as beautiful as the archer-gods of open air. You may still see them, I am told, on moonlight nights, mere shadows in the hedgerows now, and catch the faint command, the bugle echo, the tread of muffled feet; till when they pass the place we seek they turn to jeer upon the girl I spoke of—stripped, whipped, crucified, . . . naked and ashamed."

"Why was she stripped and whipped?" asked Pandora.

"Because, though her lips breathed love, her heart was filled with hate. But here we are at Castle Joyous. Corae, let us drink a glass of wine together and speak no more of such sad things."

A moment later, we stood in the garden, with a bottle of my Espiritu Santo on the rustic table. "Taste with me," I said. "It is the wine of gold distilled from yellow ingots and double ducats—the enkindling wine that treasure-seekers drink."

Raising her glass, Pandora, with a twitch of the wrist, spilled a few drops, in this quaint usage of modern country folk unconsciously offering a libation to Olympus. Then she tossed the wine off—not in sips, as well bred women wet their lips, but at a voluptuous swallow.

III.

A few hours later, soon after finishing our midday meal, Professor Vanni became violently ill. When he had been put to bed by his servant, Pandora was unremitting in her inquiries and offers of service. He would have no doctor, being himself an accomplished herbalist, and wrote his own prescription for an antidote. Reflecting upon our simple diet that day, which Mrs. Oldcorn had prepared, I could think of nothing doubtful except the mushrooms Pandora had obtained from Kushto Macromengro. I had not tasted these, and fortunately Vanni had eaten of them sparingly. Upon mentioning to him the hands through which they had passed, he nodded and said, "The touch of those brown hands changed them to toadstools."

The next morning he was better, and I left him in charge of his valet, after shocking Mrs. Oldcorn by telling her of our suspicions. I resolved to seek Kushto Macromengro, and picture to him some of the disagreeable possibilities of life. I had not spent one summer fishing with gipsy guides without learning their ways; and now, in observing at the fringe of the forest a tree marked XX, I knew it for a token of twisted tail cipher, and doubted not the poacher was near—possibly watching me. I pursued my walk listening intently. It was a theory with Vanni that cultivation of the senses refines the mental perception; and by way of sharpening my wits during our residence together in Italy, he had so exercised my hearing, that now across the stillness of Withering Leaves I could perceive the barking of dogs upon the far horizon and hear the tinkle of Bristol church-bells

"As the gipsy came on I fired two shots in instant succession, . . . with the second splitting the cudgel in his hand"

nine miles distant, could catch above me the murmur of unfledged rooks talking in their sleep, and on the Broadwater road, a mile away, distinguish a man's measured tread, a woman's lighter step, and a child's pitapat following after. I soon became conscious of a stealthy footfall, and knew that Pandora's bulldog was at my heels.

Crossing an open glade, I paused at its fringe, and raising a small field-glass which hung at my side, looked over the country. Everyone knows that by holding a field-glass reversed, with the large lens an inch from the eye, and looking not through but upon it, a minute and powerful reflector is obtained. I stood thus a minute, seemingly absorbed in the landscape. Suddenly in the glass I beheld Kushto peeping from the bushes twenty yards behind me. A single instant he stood, gathering himself together, then dashed forward, his short stick ready.

Letting fall the glass, I drew the five-shooter from my pocket and faced about. In those days I was quick as a whip-lash with a revolver, and as the gipsy came on, I fired two shots in instant succession, with the first slicing away the lobe of his right ear, with the second splitting the cudgel in his hand.

"Now open your mouth," I said, as he halted, "and you shall have the other three down your throat."

The ancients deemed the danger and despair of a fighting man the supreme poetic morsel, and might have given a moment to gaze at even the roughest human animal at bay. Kushto stood confronting me, laughing with bravado at what he took to be my poor shooting.

"Fairly takes the cake, sir," he said, producing a cotton handkerchief which he held to his ear. "Lucky for me you are such a bad shot!"

"Mr. Macromengro," I said, "you are coming with me to the Police, where you will answer to a charge of conspiracy to poison, and of attempting a murderous attack."

He stood irresolute, deliberating whether to take the chances of a rush upon me, or to make terms. He chose the latter alternative, and instantly appealed to me to let him go upon easy conditions. "They be so rough at the Police," he added, with a grin, "and in all my life I have never been struck with a whip, never been sorry or sick."

"I wish you to answer a few questions," I said. "If I get the truth, you may run for the woods. First, who is Pandora Miduvel?"

"Perhaps one of us, maybe an orphan, says she knows neither father nor mother."

"Where did she come from?"

"Swam ashore. Like all young gentlemen, you think the Rahnee's taken a fancy your way, but she's not. In the end she'll marry me."

"She would marry you if I and my Italian friend were done for?"

"You don't want me to peach on the kid, sir. ask yourself if that would be fair. But she hates the seedy swell that's with you, and she'll wear widow's weeds for no one but me."

"Where did you gather the toadstools she got from you yesterday?"

His mouth quivered, and he stood watching me nervously.

"She has refused to marry you unless, if a good chance offered, such as this just now, you knocked me on the head."

He cast his eyes down and began drawing circles in the dust with the point of his foot.

"Silence pleads guilty. You have given me as good answers as I expected,

and now you may go. But the next time we meet in this wood I shall take better aim, and my word for it . . . I'll marry Pandora Miduvel"

Midday drew near when I returned to Castle Joyous, to find Vaini better, Pandora at his bedside reading aloud, and Mrs Oldcorn bringing up a tray furnished with an invalid's repast, "old man's diet" she called it, which I recognised as a goulash of minced beef, with stewed potatoes and onions, and scraps of buttered pork. I persuaded him to drink a little mulled wine, which I heated and spiced myself.

As the hours wore on, I strolled into the garden, meditating my project of a surprise for Vaini—which was to go that night, attended by his servant and mine, to Lansdowne Hill and sink the treasure-drill at the point he had marked with a white pebble. If beneath all this speculation there rested a golden corner-stone, I meant to reach it.

It was a tranquil day, one of the rare and splendid days that are remembered when in the brooding silence of October we walk amid the summer's wreckage. It is then we recall the baby leaves unfolding, the perfect boughs uplifted, the long afternoons—soundless, save for redstart chirpings. Such days, and our loves, will seem, at the end, the only things worth cherishing.

To this garden Pandora often came, preening her little plumage, idle and carefree as those proverbial beings that in springtime smile at the winter's frost. In the brilliant sunshine her plain gown seemed spun about with films such as the fairies wear—a witchery of amber light and violet shade. From what far bourne had she been severed and brought back into the picture of earthly scenes? At what hidden springs had she tasted the instinct which teaches such strange folk their wisdom? Would she go through life as young as yesterday, yet older than the grey of weather-beaten rocks? I could but feel that to her reasoning Vaini and I were attempting a desecration of the girl-goddess, whose shrine she lived to defend.

There before me, at the end of the rose-walk, where a tiny fountain bubbled into an antique basin which might have seen the hyacinths bloom in Aquæ Sulis, stood Pandora, trellising a vine.

"This garden is like you, Pandora," I said—"sun-kissed and wild."

"The fine gentleman who made it," she answered gravely, "might not thank you. Years ago I heard say he was some wise man, like the seedy swell upstairs. His garden was to be no mere patchwork of walks and borders, but should speak a meaning. In the sunlight he set clusters of brilliant roses, and under this trellis great banks of violets which seek the shade, . . . so in the two, placed thus, he read the sunshine and shadow of life . . . and of love."

"Love!" I whispered: "to think that you should speak that word to me."

The day was ending, its crimson fading to sapphire in the dark. The Cathedral vesper filled the air, and a lurid sunset, gleaming through the pines, bathed the yellow elders in luminous sheen. Behind us, great lilac bushes were heaped with tints of Tyrian purple; and listening to the trickling fountain, I knew the hour held its way in music. If ever I were to act upon Vaini's wish and seek to lure the brown girl from his circle, now was the time!

"It is true, then," I said, "that every garden fountain has its nymph, and that I have found her under this evening's sky."

She listened with a look of fixed aversion, and answered, "It is Kushto Macromengro that you found to-day."

"Yes," I assented unconcernedly; "better so than that he found me unprepared. So he has been for fresh orders?"

"He has not been here," she replied. "If I know what happens, it is for the same reason that the lightest vapour casts its tell-tale shadow. Shoes marked with the city of Withering Leaves, and on your table a revolver with two empty chambers . . . . Have you killed him?"

"Far worse. I told him I shall marry you."

An angry flush suffused her face, and I could scarce suppress a smile at thus rousing the devil. "I sometimes think," I added, hoping to pique her to an unguarded nord, "that you gaze on many shapes I cannot see. It would not surprise me that you behold the forgotten things of my life, or that you should tell me they are best worth my remembering. Now, if it be true that fate lies in the hollow of a hand, put both your hands in mine and I will tell you what dwells in the mind of the gods—and of a woman."

"Nay, tell it to yourself," she answered—"you that spend a summer blowing upon dead coals. You are not the first that has been measuring and digging and setting odd marks in the ground." Then, with sudden exaltation, she added, "If you would know where springs the oozing from the earth so many have sought, come with me the first dark night, and I will show you that treasure of your life you grope after alone in vain!"

Beneath the sunset her eyes were deep as her ominous words. I remembered with a shudder how Ormès and Almodoro were taken to find the treasure of their lives and left for dead. But after a moment's seeming reflection, I answered, "To-night I dare not leave my friend, but to-morrow night at eleven you and I will meet where we now stand, and we will wander away so far together that all the rest of life may not suffice to bring us back."

That same night, when eleven struck, Vaini was asleep, Mrs. Oldcorn and Pandora had retired to their rooms, and carrying my shoes in one hand and the treasure-drill in the other, I went softly downstairs in my slippers. The two valets awaited me, and we were soon well on our way to Lansdowne Hill. I laughed aloud to think I had stolen a march upon the girl-goddess. Bathonians keep early hours, and we met no one, nor were lights visible in the houses. Once only, in the distance, a gleam flashed, as though an eye opened upon the horizon. There was no sound, save the thin whisper of the night. A mile away spread the black shape of Withering Leaves, and overhead were the stars and rising crescent the Flamens and sentinels of Aquæ Sulis knew.

I had resolved to remain the shortest possible time exposed to accident, and my dispositions were instantly made. I stationed one of the men at the roadside, and the second forty yards in the other direction, facing the only house in that neighbourhood. They were to stand with their backs to me, to be keenly on the alert, and to give warning of the approach of man or woman. After his discomfiture of the morning, I did not anticipate that Kishto Macromengro would be very enterprising, and with Pandora Midured asleep, there seemed small likelihood of interruption.

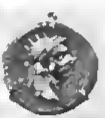
I had thoroughly tested Vaini's invention beforehand. At each fifteen inches insertion into the ground, it was to be withdrawn, and emptied of the handfuls of earth thus extracted. I fell to work vigorously, plunging the tube into the gravel by means of its revolving handle, emptying it and beginning anew. My excitement may be conceived, when at a depth of five feet I felt its drill grinding

"'Now, if it be true that fate lies in the hollow of a hand, put both your hands in mine."

against a hard substance. Upon carefully withdrawing it and running the earth through my fingers I found three coins, at the cold touch of which I could have shouted for joy—for the secret so long and tragically guarded was revealed, and the Celestial Virgin's treasure was ours! I pocketed them, strapped the treasure-drill over my shoulder and was refilling the opening I had made with loose earth at my feet, when my servant came running back from the roadside in a tremble. I drew my revolver, and we stood side by side. He was too frightened to mutter more than that something had run noiselessly past him, flickering in the starlight. I advanced a few steps, peering into the darkness, but although the moon was rising, discovered no more than that the velvet-footed mist gathered its phantom shadows.

Suddenly from behind came a cry, and the sound of a falling body. We hastened back to Vaini's servant, whom we lifted half unconscious, his face streaming with blood. Between us, we helped him to the roadside, where I gave both men some brandy from my flask. Not more than twenty minutes had elapsed since we came—yet to me it seemed longer than the night. As soon as the injured man had bound up his wound with my handkerchief, and could walk, we made our retreat down the hill. He was obliged to halt several times to stanch the flow of blood, and in one of these intervals told me with some difficulty—for his hurt had included the breaking of his front teeth—that he had seen nothing, but that from the darkness a stone, the size of a man's fist, had been hurled with the force of a catapult, and had felled him to the ground.

I was in a state of nervous tension when, unlocking the front door of Castle Joyous with a passkey, I perceived from the lights and tread of feet that something unusual to the repose of the house had happened. Not till afterwards did I learn that an alarming noise had awakened the maids who slept above Pandora, and that Vaini and Mrs. Oldcorn in their rooms were startled by the frantic cries of one struggling with a nightmare. "Keep him away—drive him back—don't let him dig in the ground!"



'I found three coins'

Now she had issued forth to the head of the stair I was ascending, and I beheld her, a silvery figure in the half-light, gazing upon me with the tumult of a meteoric passion. For a breathless instant it seemed that, through her disarray, I beheld Pandora transfigured to a being statuesque and heroic, whose shrine I had profaned. The moonlight became clearer, and I paused motionless, listening to the harping of the breeze. In that weird instant I knew that an unknown presence had come with the virgin feet of the day, motioning me back from the precincts of a vanished world.

Then the supernatural faded, and the human Pandora fell upon a chair and burst into a paroxysm of tears.

IV

At an early hour on the following morning I made a full report to Vaini, still resting on what had been his bed of pain, and placed in his eager hands the three coins that had come to light. Two are gold, one bearing the effigy of the deified

"I beheld her, a silvery figure in the half-light, gazing upon me with the tumult of a meteoric passion."

Julius Cæsar, perhaps struck in the first year of Octavian, the second showing a head of Agrippina. The third, when freed of dirt and polished, proved to be a piece of great rarity, imprint with artistic grace—a silver Tetradrachm of Metapontum.

At midday I was sitting in the little parlour adjoining the dining-room, when, to my astonishment, Pandora entered with outstretched hands and a radiant smile revealing a flash of white teeth.

"Forgive me," she said, "my mannerless folly last night It was a bad dream that drugged me, and you, who have the habit of sun-dreams, will bear with mine!"

I observed intently this play of oddity and emotion, remembering my tutor's caution that life might depend upon detecting the undercurrent of this strange creature's thought. Was it her nature to pass thus from day to night, from night to day, without either dawn or twilight? Stamped upon her face, beyond all weeping and waiting, was indeed the footprint of a violent grief The bloom of her youthful beauty had faded in an hour, as a woman's face changes amid sudden sorrow and anxiety. Behind this outburst of good-will was that composed self mastery with which the great felines regard an imminent danger. In her eyes lay the mystery of a cloud-covered sea. Was it that I but saw in them my own reflected misgiving, or did I discern behind their lustre a cold and deathless hate?

I took her hands and playfully caressed them.

"We will leave our dreams," I said, with half-conscious irony: "you your nightmare and I my wasted reveries. Some day let us seek together a beautiful far country where the only dream will be that Love is for ever."

As she listened, her eyes were raised towards the leaded window-panes glinting in the summer sunlight, and I saw that they were moistened with tears, and marvelled that my careless word had struck so deep She left me abruptly, and presently I heard her singing in the adjoining dining-room. I heard, too, the uncorking of a bottle—a sound that excited my curiosity, for Pandora never deigned concern herself with household matters Then her step traversed the hall, and I went into the dining-room to find that, of three or four bottles standing on the dresser, she had drawn the cork of one and placed it invitingly on the table at my chair The luncheon hour drew near, and before my plate was a dish of yesterday's capon, a favourite refreshment with Mrs Oldcorn, the broken meat being stripped from the bone and with fragments of a neat's tongue, buried in brown jelly. It was flanked by a plate of dandelion salad with its red splash of tomato The Professor's luncheon was to be served him in bed. I felt a strong repugnance to drinking the wine Pandora had made ready. There are nervous instants when we yield to the weakness of thinking that to do a certain thing will be unlucky, and to such an impulse I yielded in replacing that bottle, recorked, on the sideboard

In the act of doing so I heard the muffled footstep of a man in my bedroom overhead. My servant had gone into town, and I opened the hall door slightly and waited Noiselessly down the stair came a furtive tread, till, stepping forth, I confronted Kushto Macromengro. Without evincing surprise at his presence, I drew him into the dining-room, and said it had been my intention to visit Withering Leaves again some day to show I bore no grudge. I inquired after his damaged ear, and reminding him that the following day was Sunday, declared I would give him five shillings to buy beer and tobacco Affecting to find no money in my pockets, I vowed with a chuckle he should taste sherry from my private stock, and placed in his hands the bottle of Pandora's choice.

"You shall drink deep as brandy-Nan!" I said, slapping him on the shoulder; "but meanwhile hide this wine in some capacious pocket and make for the woods by the garden gate."

It struck me the rascal was in haste to be gone, as, with merely a nod, he strode past and was out of sight

I immediately went to my room, and there made a discovery which caused me an emotion. On the floor, resting against the wooden partition which divided Vaini's room from mine, and against which stood his bed, was a box filled with gunpowder and bullets. A lighted fuse trailed on the floor, of such length that an hour must have elapsed—the hour when I would have been regaling myself with yesterday's capon and sherry—before the explosion. My companion, in his bed, would have been riddled with bullets, or, as Almodoro phrased it of Ormès, "smitten with the club of Hercules." I summoned Vaini to come and see for himself to what his scheming led. For once he betrayed strong excitement, and I heard his quivering lips mutter, "*Razza di Cane!*"

I seized the moment to inform him that, in view of the gravity our adventure had assumed, it must cease at once, adding my intention to take that evening's train for London, and that our mutual safety required that he also relinquish the search and come with me. My reasons for letting fall again that thick veil our efforts had so nearly lifted were expressed with no little pungency, and I summed them in a favourite dictum of my former fellow-student Mr. Orion Marblehead:

"It is not safe to spend too much time monkeying with Hell."

My instructor in the curious arts yielded with a bad grace, and, still trembling to his knees, gave way before his inability to proceed alone. In the course of that evening's journey he assured me seventeen times that the miscarriage of his hopes was wholly due to my maladroitness, and repeatedly declared that in failing to entice Pandora's affections, I had missed the opportunity of my life.

"Only to think," he ejaculated, "that I was on the point of scaling the unclimbable mountains! . . . . And now what have I to show except a set of false teeth for Pasquale?" Once or twice before, in other matters, he had censured my imperfect range of vision when scanning the perspective of bygone centuries; but now, for the only time in our long acquaintance, he displayed an extreme irritability, and for nearly a year our friendly relations suffered a chill.

Having extinguished the fuse, I rushed downstairs in pursuit of Pandora, but, needless to say, she was not to be found. Mrs. Oldcorn returned from the girl's room declaring that she had taken her bonnet and shawl and gone over the bend of the world, adding that young women now-a-days are "not good for anythink," and that this particular specimen was "only black rubbage."

"But she is your niece," I cried, a new light breaking.

The hasty explanation was made that Pandora Miduvel was nowise her relative, but a waif rescued and educated by the late wormeater, for reasons best known to himself.

In London a week later I received a letter from Mrs. Oldcorn, saying that Pandora had returned to her wild life. Doubtless the dark beauty had merely withdrawn to another coign of vantage. She added that in a glen at Withering Leaves where Kushto had a shelter, his body had been found before the ashes of a camp-fire, over which still hung a kettle containing a bit of bacon and a couple of duck's eggs. He had lain thus for several days, bent backward in the distortion of strychnine poisoning, and near him rested an empty bottle labelled *Espiritu Santo*.

Ten years later, in May 1885, passing a month in London, I was invited by a medical acquaintance to visit with him Bethlehem Hospital, popularly called Bedlam, where was his professional service. At the end of an hour's inspection of various wards, each having its grade of insanity, we passed into a garden, within high walls, where in pleasant weather the more tractable madcaps were

allowed to walk. It being their dinner-hour, the place was deserted, save by a little old swarthy woman, who turned her wrinkled visage and passionate eyes towards me in a careless glance.

My guide, noticing the intentness with which I observed her, murmured, "One of our oddest patients: I know not her name, nor her story, nor whence she comes. She speaks of herself as *Pandy*, and is usually quiet, as you see her. Only at intervals, once in two or three months, she bursts into a paroxysm of tremendous fury. We always know when to prepare for these fits. An hour before the spasm, she begins a hoarse muttering, ever more rapid, and ending in demoniac yells: ". . . Keep him away . . . Drive him back . . . Don't let him dig in the ground!"

In 1900 I returned, weather-beaten and frost-crumbled, to Bath, to drink its waters. I go there now each November, and often pass the places Vaini and I knew together. Castle Joyous has disappeared, and amid new furrows and turnip fields I can only conjecture the forest fringe which Kushto Macromengro frequented.

The drifted leaves lie heaped above that buried Summer, and to my eyes the familiar poplars cast a longer and sadder shade. The walk through Withering Leaves still keeps its fragrant charm, and in the turquoise dusk of distance the hills gleam with poetic beauty. I look upon the Avon and listen to its song of myriad meaning, and beneath its calm behold the prism wherein my youthful gaze divined such marvels. Upon its surface at night I see the Milky Way reflected and know that this starlight tracery upon the water is the Celestial Virgin's dustless path.

In the hush of these my twilight days I remember Pandora, and think how our brief meeting burnt a mark in my life. Whence came this fierce girl who "swam ashore,' and whose prescience demolished our endeavour? Was the legend of the goddess of Aquæ Sulis known to her, and was she filled with the fire of a powerful purpose which, when accomplished, left her life empty? Was no frail germ of feminine tenderness enfolded within the harsh discords whereby alone I knew her? How fantastic in the retrospect is this ill-omened example of Vaini's art—the gate of another world half-opened, our goal no further than Yesterday from To-morrow. Within, we see the crystal roses and hear the rippling river, with its whisper whereof music is made. We gaze upon Aquæ Sulis, and hear the deathless bugles of a Roman Legion. Above their faint reverberation rises an ever-deepening note of tragedy. Then, as though the Fates played with loaded dice, the maiden-dawn changes to flame. And, remembering these things, I linger before the insoluble question—within the folds and windings of that Shadow-land we ponder, may it be that the survival of some bygone age still whispers the living Present?

Occasionally my field-path rambles lead across Lansdowne Hill. I pause to look upon the spot where in the stillness of a summer midnight I sank Vaini's treasure-drill into the ground. The antique coins then recovered are before me, witnesses to the accuracy with which he calculated the position of the ton of gold there buried. But I never feel the wish to probe for it again. Better than any one now living I understand that in defence of her own the Celestial Virgin is a tigress at bay. I have no desire to evoke afresh that demon of fears and hate. For well I know that at the slightest menace a spectral arm would be outstretched as before. At the first step I should recoil before the consciousness of an arresting presence, springing suddenly into being behind me, and turning, should behold again a tawny girl of rare beauty regarding me in silent menace with the sweet and implacable smile I remember.

WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

SEPTIMUS SEPTIMUSSON.

A FAIRY STORY.

BY E. NESBIT.

ILLUSTRATED BY W. HEATH ROBINSON.

THE wind was screaming over the marsh. It shook the shutters and rattled the windows, and the little boy lay awake in the bare attic. His mother came softly up the ladder stairs, shading the flame of the tallow candle with her hand.

"I'm not asleep, mother," said he; and she heard the tears in his voice.

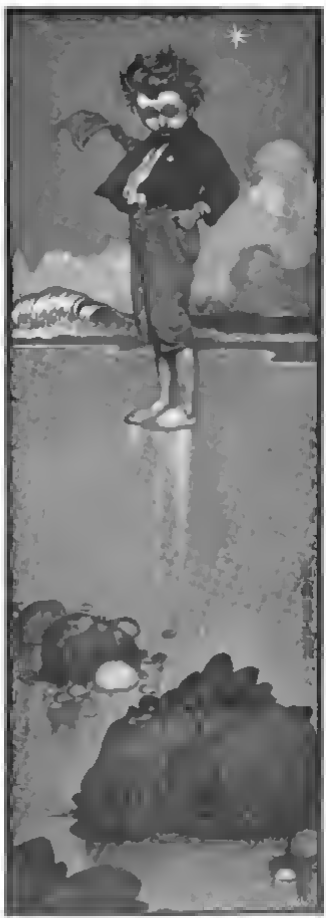
"Why, silly lad," she said, sitting down on the straw bed beside him and putting the candle on the floor, "what are you crying for?"

"It's the wind keeps calling me, mother," he said; "it won't let me alone. It never has, since I put up the little weathercock for it to play with. It keeps saying, 'Wake up, Septimus Septimusson! Wake up. You're the seventh son of a seventh son—you can see the fairies and hear the beasts talk, and you must go out and seek your fortune.' And I'm afraid, and I don't want to go."

"I should think not, indeed," said his mother. "The wind doesn't talk, Sep, not really. You just go to sleep, like a good boy, and I'll get father to bring you a gingerbread pig from the fair to-morrow."

But Sep lay awake a long time, listening to what the wind really did keep on saying, and feeling ashamed to think how frightened he was of going out all alone to seek his fortune—a thing all the boys in books were only too happy to do.

Next morning father brought home the loveliest gingerbread pig with currant eyes. Sep ate it, and it made him less anxious than ever to go out into the world, where perhaps no one would give him gingerbread pigs ever any more.



"*I know I'm a coward, said Sep*"

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Before he went to bed he ran down to the shore, where a great new harbour was being made. The workmen had been blasting the big rocks, and on one of the rocks a lot of mussels were sticking. He stood looking at them, and then suddenly he heard a lot of little voices crying.

"Oh, Sep, we're so frightened. We're choking."

The voices were thin and sharp as the edges of mussel shells. They were, indeed, the voices of the mussels themselves.

"Oh, dear," said Sep, "I'm so sorry; but I can't move the rock back into the sea, you know. Can I, now?"

"No," said the mussels; "but if you speak to the wind—you know his language, and he's very fond of you since you made that toy for him—he'll blow the sea up till the waves wash us back into deep water."

"But I'm afraid of the wind," said Sep; "it says things that frighten me."

"Oh, very well," said the mussels. "We don't want you to be afraid. We can die all right, if necessary."

Then Sep shivered and trembled.

"Go away," said the thin, sharp voices. "We'll die—but we'd rather die in our own brave company."

"I know I'm a coward," said Sep. "Oh, wait a minute."

"Death won't wait," said the little voices.

"I can't speak to the wind: I won't," said Sep, but almost at the same moment he heard himself call out: "Oh, wind, please come and blow up the waves to save the poor mussels."

The wind answered with a blustering shout. "All right, my boy," it shrieked, "I'm coming."

And come it did. And when it had attended to the mussels, it came and whispered to Sep in his attic. And, to his great surprise, instead of covering his head with the bed-clothes as usual, and trying not to listen, he found himself sitting up in bed and talking to the wind—man to man.

"Why," he said, "I'm not afraid of you any more."

"Of course not; we're friends now," said the wind. "That's because we joined together to do a kindness to some one. There's nothing like that for making people friends."

"Oh!" said Sep.

"Yes," said the wind, "and now, old chap, when will you go out to seek your fortune? Remember how poor your father is; and the fortune, if you find it, won't be just for you, but for your father and mother and the others."

"Oh," said Sep, "I didn't think of that."

"Yes," said the wind; "really, my dear fellow, I do hate to bother you, but it's better to fix a time. Now, then, when shall we start?"

"We?" said Sep. "Are you going with me?"

"I'll see you a bit of the way," said the wind. "What do you say now? Shall we start to-night? There's no time like the present."

"I do hate going," said Sep.

"Of course you do," said the wind cordially. "Come along. Get into your things, and we'll make a beginning."

So Sep dressed, and he wrote on his slate in very big letters, "Gone to seek our fortune," and he put it on the table so that his mother should see it when she came down in the morning. And he went out of the cottage, and the wind kindly shut the door after him.

The wind gently pushed him down to the shore, and there he got into his father's boat, which was called the *Septimus and Susie*, after his father and mother, and the wind carried him across to another country, and there he landed.

"Now," said the wind, clapping him on the back, "off you go, and good luck to you."

And it turned round and took the boat home again, wrong way up.

When Sep's mother found the writing on the slate, and his father found the boat gone, they feared that Sep was drowned; but when the wind brought the boat back wrong way up they were quite sure, and they both cried for many a long day.

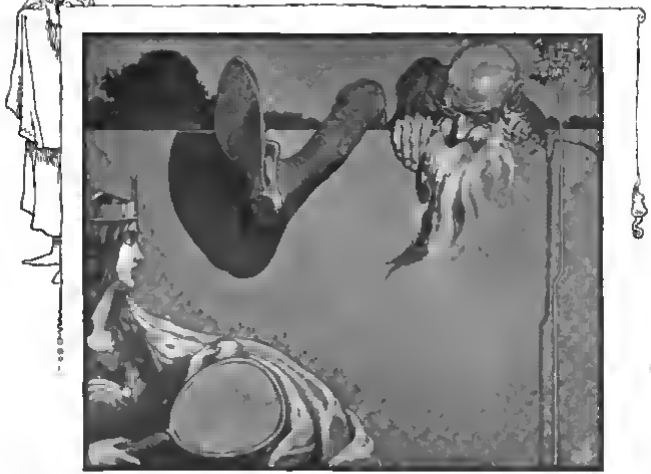
The wind tried to tell them that Sep was all right; but they couldn't understand wind-talk, and they only said, "Drat the wind!" and fastened the shutters up tight and put wedges in the windows.

Sep walked along the straight white road that led across the new country. He had no more idea how to look for *his* fortune than you would have if you suddenly left off reading this and went out of your front door to seek *yours*.

However, he had made a start, and

that is always something. When he had gone exactly seven miles on that straight foreign road, between strange trees and bordered with flowers he did not know the names of, he heard a groaning in the wood, and some one sighing and saying, "Oh, how hard it is—to have to die and never see my wife and the little ones again."

The voice was rough as a lion's mane, and strong as a lion's claws,



The magician got at the Princess when she was playing ball in the garden

and Sep was very frightened. But he said, "I'm not afraid," and then oddly enough he found he had spoken the truth. He wasn't afraid any more.

He broke through the bushes, and found that the person who had spoken was indeed a lion. A javelin had pierced its shoulder and fastened it to a great tree.

"All right," cried Sep; "hold still a minute, sir."

He got out his knife, and cut and cut at the shaft of the javelin till he was able to break it off. Then the lion drew back, and the broken shaft passed through the wound and the javelin was left sticking in the tree.

"I'm really extremely obliged, my dear fellow," said the lion warmly. "Pray command me, if there's any little thing I can do for you at any time."

"Don't mention it," said Sep, with proper politeness; "delighted to have been of use to you, I'm sure."

So they parted the best of friends. As Sep scrambled through the bushes back to the road he kicked against an axe that lay on the ground.

"Hullo," said he, "some poor woodman's dropped this and not been able to find it. I'll take it along—perhaps I may meet him."

He was getting very tired and very hungry, and presently he sat down to rest under a chestnut tree, and he heard two little voices talking in the branches, voices soft as a squirrel's fur and bright as a squirrel's eyes. They were, indeed, the voices of two squirrels.

"Hush!" said one, "there's some one below."

"Oh," said the other, "it's a horrid boy. Let's scurry away!"

"I'm not a horrid boy," said Sep. "I'm the seventh son of a seventh son."

"Oh," said Mrs. Squirrel, "of course

that makes all the difference Have some nuts?"

"Rather," said Sep. "At least, I mean yes, if you please"

So the squirrels brought nuts down to him, and when he had eaten as many as he wanted they filled his pockets; and then in return he chopped all the lower boughs off the chestnut tree, so that boys who were *not* seventh sons could not climb up and interfere with the squirrels' housekeeping arrangements

Then they parted, the best of friends, and Sep went on

"I haven't found my fortune yet," said he, "but I've made a friend or two"

And just as he was saying that he turned a corner of the road, and met an old gentleman in a fur lined coat riding a fine big grey horse

"Hullo!" said the gentleman "Who are you, and where are you off to so bright and early?"

"I'm Septimus Septimusson," said Sep, "and I'm going to seek my fortune."

"And you've taken an axe to help you carve your way to glory?"

"No," said Sep, "I found it, and I suppose some one lost it, so I'm bringing it along in case I meet him."

"Heavy, isn't it?" said the old gentleman.

"Yes," said Sep.

"Then I'll carry it for you," said the old gentleman, "for it's one that my head forester lost yesterday. And now come along with me, for you're the boy I've been looking for for seven years—an honest boy and the seventh son of a seventh son."

So Sep went home with the gentleman, who was a great lord in that country; and he lived in that lord's castle and was taught everything that a gentleman ought to know. And in return he told the lord all about the ways of birds and beasts; for as he understood their talk he knew more about them than any one else in that country. And the lord wrote it all down in a book, and half the people said it was wonderfully clever, and the other half said it was nonsense and how could he know? This was Fame, and the lord was very pleased.

But though the old lord was so famous, he would not leave his castle, for he had a hump that an enchanter had fastened on to him, and he couldn't bear to be seen with it.

"But you'll get rid of it for me some day, my boy," he used to say. "No one but the seventh son of a seventh son and an honest boy can do it. So all the doctors say."

So Sep grew up And when he was twenty-one, straight as a lance and handsome as a picture, the old lord said to him:

"My boy, you've been like a son to me; but now it's time you got married and had sons of your own Is there any girl you'd like to marry?"

"No," said Sep. "I never did care much for girls."

The old lord laughed.

"Then you must set out again and seek your fortune once more," he said, "because no man has really found his fortune till he's found the lady who is his heart's lady Choose the best horse in the stable, and off you go, lad, and my blessing go with you."

So Sep chose a good red horse and set out, and he rode straight to the great city that shone golden across the plain, and when he got there he found every one crying

"Why, whatever is the matter?" said Sep, reining in the red horse in front of a smithy, where the apprentices were crying into the fires and the smith was dropping tears on to the anvil.

"Why, the Princess is dying," said the blacksmith, blowing his nose. "A nasty wicked magician—he had a spite against the King, and he got at the Princess when she was playing ball in the garden—and now she's blind and deaf and dumb And she won't eat."

"And she'll die," said the first apprentice

"And she *is* such a dear," said the other apprentice

Sep sat on the red horse, thinking.

"Has anything been done?" he asked.

"Oh yes," said the blacksmith "All the doctors have seen her, but they can't do anything And the King has advertised in the usual way that any one who can cure her may marry her. But it's no good Kings' sons aren't what they used to be A silly lot they are nowadays, all taken up with football and cricket and golf——"

"Humph!" said Sep "Thank you Which is the way to the palace?"

The blacksmith pointed, and then burst into tears again Sep rode on

When he got to the palace he asked to see the King. Every one there was crying too, from the footman, who opened the door, to the King, who was sitting upon his golden throne and looking at his fine collection of butterflies through floods of tears.

"Oh, dear me, yes, young man," said the King, "you may *see* her, and welcome, but it won't be any good."

"We can but try," said Sep. So he was taken to the room where the Princess sat, huddled up on her silver throne among the white velvet cushions, with her crown all on one side, crying out of her poor blind eyes so that the tears ran down over her green gown with the roses on it.

"Looking at his fine collection of butterflies."

And directly he saw her he knew that, Princess as she was, with a crown and a throne, she was the only girl who could ever be his heart's lady. He went up to her and knelt at her side, and took her hand and kissed it.

The Princess started. She could not see him or hear him, but at the touch of his hand and his lips she knew that he was her heart's lord, and she threw her arms round his neck and cried more than ever.

He held her in his arms, and stroked her hair till she stopped crying, and then he called for bread-and-milk. This was brought in a silver basin, and he fed her with it as you feed a little child.

The news ran through the city, "The Princess has eaten," and all the bells were set ringing. Sep said good-night to his Princess, and went to bed in the best bedroom of the palace. Early in the grey morning he got up and leaned out of the open window, and called to his old friend the wind.

And the wind came bustling in, and clapped him on the back, crying, "Well, my boy, and what can I do for you? Eh?"

Sep told him all about the Princess.

"Well," said the wind, "you've not done so badly. At any rate, you've got her love. And you couldn't have got that

with anybody's help but your own. Now, of course, the thing to do is to find the wicked magician."

"Of course," said Sep.

"Well, I travel a good deal; I'll keep my eyes open, and let you know if I hear anything."

Sep spent the day holding the Princess's hand, and feeding her at meal-times; and that night the wind rattled his window and said, "Let me in."

It came in very noisily, and said: "Well, I've found your magician, he's in the forest, pretending to be a mole."

"How can I find him?" said Sep.

"Haven't you any friends in the forest?" asked the wind.

Then Sep remembered his friends the squirrels, and he mounted his horse and rode away to the chestnut tree where they lived. They were charmed to see him grown so tall and strong and handsome, and when he had told them his story they said at once: "Oh, *yes*! delighted to be of any service to you."

And they called all their little brothers and cousins and uncles and nephews, to search the forest for a mole that wasn't really a mole; and quite soon they found him, and hustled and shoved him along till he was face to face with Sep in a green glade. The glade was green, but all the bushes and trees around were red-brown with squirrel fur and shiny bright with squirrel eyes.

Then Sep said, "Give the Princess back her eyes and her hearing and her voice."

But the mole would not.

"Give the Princess back her eyes and her hearing and her voice," said Sep again.

But the mole only gnashed his wicked teeth and snarled.

And then in a minute the squirrels fell on the mole, and killed it. And Sep thanked them, and rode back to the palace, for of course he knew that when a magician is killed all his magic unworks itself instantly.

But when he got to his Princess she was still as deaf as a post and as dumb as a stone, and she was still crying bitterly with her poor blind eyes, till the tears ran down her grass-green gown with the red roses on it.

"Cheer up, my sweetheart," he said, though he knew she couldn't hear him. And as he spoke the wind came in at the open window, and spoke very softly, because it was in the presence of a Princess.

"All right," it whispered; "the old villain gave us the slip that journey. Got out of the moleskin in the very nick of time. He's a wild boar now."

"Come," said Sep, fingering his sword-hilt. "I'll kill him myself this time, without asking any questions."

So he went forth and fought the wild boar. But it was a most uncommon boar, as big as a horse, with tusks half a yard long; and although Sep wounded it, it jerked the sword out of his hand with its tusk, and was just going to trample him out of life with its hard, heavy pig's feet, when a great roar sounded through the forest.

"Ah! would you?" said the lion, and fastened teeth and claws in the great boar's back. The boar turned with a scream of rage, but the lion had got a good grip, and it did not loosen teeth or claws till the boar lay quiet.

"Is he dead?" asked Sep, when he came to himself.

"Oh yes, he's *dead* right enough," said the lion.

But the wind came up puffing and blowing, and said: "It's no good; he's got away again, and now he's a fish. I was just a minute too late to see *what* fish. An old oyster told me about it, only he hadn't the wit to notice what particular fish the scoundrel changed into."

So then Sep went back to the palace, and he said to the King: "Let me marry the dear Princess, and we'll go out and seek our fortune. I've got to kill that magician, and I'll do it too, or my name's not Septimus Septimusson. But it may take years and years, and I can't be away from the Princess all that time, because she won't eat unless I feed her. You see the difficulty, sire?"

The King saw it. And that very day Sep was married to the Princess in her green gown with the red roses on it, and they set out together.

The wind went with them, and the wind, or something else, seemed to say to Sep, "Go home, take your wife to your mother."

So he did. He crossed the land and he crossed the sea, and he went up the red-brick path to his father's cottage, and he peeped in at the door and said: "Father, mother, here's my wife."

"And he fed her with it as you feed a little child"

They were so pleased to see him—for they had thought him dead—that they didn't notice the Princess much at first; and when they did notice her they wondered at her beautiful face and her beautiful gown; but it wasn't till they had all settled down at supper—broiled rabbit, it was—and they noticed Sep feeding his wife as one feeds a baby, that they saw how she was blind. And then all the story had to be told.

"Well, well," said the fisherman, "you and your wife bide here with us. I dare say I'll catch that old sinner in my nets one of these fine days."

But he never did, and Sep and his wife lived with the old people. And they were happy after a fashion; but of an evening Sep used to wander and wonder, and wonder and wander by the sea shore, wondering as he wandered whether he would ever have the luck to catch that fish.

And one evening as he wandered wondering, he heard a little, sharp, thin voice say:

"Sep, I've got it."

"What?" asked Sep, forgetting his manners.

"I've got it," said a big mussel on a rock close by him—"the magic stone that the magician does his enchantments with. He dropped it out of his mouth, and I shut my shell on it, and now he's sweeping up and down the sea like a mad fish, looking for it; for he knows he can never change into anything else unless he gets it back. Here, take the nasty thing; it's making me feel quite ill."

It opened its shell wide, and Sep saw a pearl. He reached out his hand and took it.

"That's better," said the mussel, washing its shell out with salt water.

"Can *I* do magic with it?" Sep eagerly asked.

"No," said the mussel sadly; "it's of no use to any but the owner. Now, if I were you, I'd get into a boat; and if your friend the wind will help us, I believe we really can do the trick."

"I'm at your service, of course," said the wind, getting up instantly.

The mussel whispered to the wind, who rushed off at once, and Sep launched his boat.

"Now," said the mussel, "you get into the very middle of the sea, or as near as you can guess it. The wind will warn all the other fishes." And as he spoke he disappeared in the dark waters.

Sep got the boat into the middle of the sea—as near as he could guess it—and waited.

After a long time he saw something swirling about in a sort of whirlpool about a hundred yards from his boat; but when he tried to move the boat towards it, her bows ran on to something hard.

"Keep still, keep still, keep still!" cried thousands and thousands of sharp little thin voices. "You'll kill us if you move."

Then he looked over the boat side, and saw that the hard something was nothing but thousands and thousands of mussels all jammed close together, and through the clear water more and more were coming and piling themselves together. Almost at once his boat was slowly lifted, the top of the mussel heap showed through the water, and there he was, high and dry on a mussel reef.

And in all that part of the sea the water was disappearing, and as far as the eye could reach stretched a great plain of purple and grey—the shells of countless mussels.

Only at one spot there was still a splashing.

Then a mussel opened its shell and spoke:

"We've got him," it said. "We've piled ourselves up till we've filled this part of the sea. The wind warned all the good fishes, and we've got the old traitor in a little pool over there. Get out and walk over our backs—we'll all lie sideways, so as not to hurt you. You must catch the fish; but whatever you do, don't kill it till we give the word."

Sep promised, and he got out and walked over the mussels to the pool, and when he saw the wicked soul of the magician looking out through the round eyes of a big fish, he remembered all that his Princess had suffered, and he longed to draw his sword and kill the wicked thing then and there.

But he remembered his promise. He threw a net about it, and dragged it back to the boat.

The mussels dispersed and let the boat down again into the water, and he rowed home, towing the evil fish in the net by a line.

He beached the boat, and looked along the shore. The shore looked a

very odd colour, and well it might, for every bit of the sand was covered with purple-grey mussels. They had all come up out of the sea—leaving just one little bit of real yellow sand for him to beach the boat on.

"Now," said the millions of sharp, thin little voices, "kill him, kill him!"

Sep drew his sword and waded into the shallow surf, and killed the evil fish with one strong stroke.

Then such a shout went up all along the shore as that shore had never heard. And all along the shore, where the mussels had been, stood men in armour, and men in smock-frocks, and men in leather aprons and huntsmen's coats, and women and children too—a whole nation of people. Close by the boat stood a King and Queen with crowns upon their heads.

"Thank you, Sep," said the King, "you've saved us all. I am the King Mussel—doomed to be a mussel so long as that wretch lived. You have set us all free. And look!"

Down the path from the shore came running his own Princess, and hung round his neck crying his name and looking at him with the most beautiful eyes in the world.

"Come," said the Mussel King. "We have no son. You shall be our son and reign after us."

"Thank you," said Sep, "but *this* is my father," and he presented the old fisherman to his Majesty.

"Then let him come with us," said the King royally; "he can help me reign, or fish in the palace lake, whichever he chooses."

"Thankee," said Sep's father, "I'll come and fish."

"Your mother too," said the Mussel Queen, kissing Sep's mother.

"Ah," said Sep's mother, "you're a lady, every inch. I'll go to the world's end with you."

So they all went back by way of the foreign country where Sep had found his Princess, and they called on the old lord. He had lost his hump as soon as the magician was dead, and they easily persuaded him to come with them.

"You can help me reign if you like; or we have a nice book or two in the palace library," said the Mussel King.

"Thank you," said the old lord, "I'll come and be your librarian if I may. Reigning isn't at all in my line."

Then they went to Sep's father-in-law, and when he saw how happy they all were together he said: "Bless my beard, but I've half a mind to come with you."

"Come along," said the Mussel King. "You shall help me reign if you like, or——"

"No, thank you," said the other King very quickly. "I've had enough of reigning. My kingdom can buy a president and be a republic if it likes. I'm going to catch butterflies."

And so he does—most happily—up to this very minute.

And Sep and his dear Princess are as happy as they deserve to be. Some people say we are all as happy as we deserve to be—but I am not sure.

"The Mussel King"

BY C. J. WILLS.

ILLUSTRATED BY ARTHUR RACKHAM.

I.

MY wife has distinctly æsthetic tastes, and of course we haven't a comfortable chair in the house. All our rooms are provided with dado and friezes—the colours are artistic, but hideous; even our drawing-room chairs are Chippendale,—they are hard and uncomfortable, but correct. Our chimneys smoke, but then the grates are covered with elaborate brass and tile work. The whole of my income goes in decorations for the interior of our little Queen Anne bijou house, the name of which is exhibited in large gilt letters upon a pseudo-mediæval terra cotta tile—"Ye Snuggerie."

I had returned rather early from my office in Somerset House, fatigued with my hard day's work. My hours are long—from ten till four; we have an hour for lunch, but still I consider them long, that is to say, for a superior official. I am a Deputy-Sub-Vice-Assistant Commissioner, and so I have a room to myself. The subordinates come at nine and go at six. I was a subordinate once, but I try to blot out that dreadful time from my memory. I think my work is hard, because it is so terribly monotonous, and because even the Deputy-Sub-Vice-Assistant-Commissioners are not allowed to smoke in office hours, which is excessively annoying. The first of the month is always a pleasant day for me, for on the first we draw our pay. It was one first of July when I arrived at "Ye Snuggerie," my pay in good notes and gold in my pocket. I found my wife, all smiles, awaiting my return. It is a curious fact that on the first of the month my wife is always wreathed in smiles, for she manages to extract a varying amount from me on these occasions for the decoration of our uncomfortable but artistic little home.

"George," she said, "I have a surprise for you. I have longed for it for nearly three weeks, and I've had it sent home to-day. I hope I haven't done wrong, George," she said anxiously, as she put her hand on my shoulder. "Promise me you won't send it back again, George. But I'm sure it's an immense bargain. Mr. Lazarus himself says it's a real antique, and worth double the money."

"How much?" I said, with a sigh.

"It's only four guineas, George, but it's such a precious, precious, prayer-carpet, and I want you to look upon it as a present from me."

But I don't want a prayer-carpet," I replied, severely. "The place is full enough now of gimcracks and tomfoolery, and I really do think we can do without a prayer-carpet. This is probably a mere ugly rug made in some Indian gaol. What can you expect for four guineas? Oriental rugs——" I continued, and I was about to exhibit to my wife my superior knowledge, when I perceived that her eyes were full of tears.

"Don't cry, Rosa," I said. "I'd rather swallow the prayer-carpet whole than see you cry. Where is the thing? If Lazarus said it was a bargain, you may depend upon it that Lazarus was right."

"Oh, George, I'm sure it's genuine antique," she replied, with a little smile of relief. "It's so very ancient, in fact, that it's almost dropping to pieces."

I followed my wife into her tiny drawing-room, and there I saw the most hideous

little carpet I'd ever set eyes upon What had been its original colours I cannot say, they were so terribly subdued by the poetic dirt of ages. It was about two yards long and a yard wide. In the centre was a sort of lozenge-shaped dab of colour, upon which was an inscription in Arabic characters. Now, I can read the Arabic alphabet—not that I understand Arabic in the least, so I knelt down on the carpet and with some trouble I made out the inscription. It was simply a name—"*Sulemian ibn Daoud*."

"By Jove, Rosa," I cried, "you may have got a real treasure here! *Sulemian ibn Daoud* means 'Solomon, the son of David.' Perhaps this is the original magic carpet of King Solomon."

And then, still kneeling on the carpet, I proceeded to explain to Rosa how the great King Solomon possessed a magic carpet, which at the simple command of its owner instantaneously transported him and an unlimited number of fellow-passengers whithersoever he would.

Whether Rosa was astonished at the amount of my Oriental knowledge, or whether she merely wished to stroke me the right way, I cannot tell, but she plumped down upon the little carpet at my side and, taking my hand, said in most confiding manner, "Oh, George dear, I wonder if it really is Mr. Solomon's carpet?"

"*King* Solomon's, my dear," said I, with dignity, correcting her. "I'm afraid it's hardly likely," I continued.

"Oh, if we could only find it out, George! It would be worth ever so much, you know, then. But you'll keep it anyhow, won't you? For Mr. Lazarus's young man is to call for the carpet, or the money, in an hour."

"Very well, then, my dear, we'll soon ascertain its value," I said with a laugh, as I took her hand. "Hold tight, Rosa. I desire," I continued in a loud voice, "to be at once transported to the loveliest of all the lovely gardens that surround the great city of Ispahan."

To our intense astonishment, Rosa, the carpet and I went straight up through the ceiling of "Ye Snuggerie," and found ourselves at once in the blue empyrean. I'd never been in the blue empyrean before. Talk of change of air and scene! We were having it now with a vengeance. There was a loud rustling sound as of the beating of wings, and invisible hands held up the four corners of the carpet, as we flew through the air. The sensation was decidedly pleasant, all the same. Such was the speed at which we were travelling that Rosa's ebon locks flew out like a mane behind her.

"This is all very well," I said, "but I should like to see something of the country."

In an instant we appeared to drop like a stone out of the blue empyrean, and to my astonishment I found that we were flying through the air at terrific speed, and that beneath us in every direction we saw nothing but what appeared to be the sea.

"Where on earth can we be?" I cried.

"We must be crossing the Channel," said Rosa.

"We must have passed the Channel long ago at the rate we have been travelling," I exclaimed.

"Oh, George," said my wife, "the old carpet is very rotten, and if anything happened we should be drowned."

I reassured her. I placed a protecting arm round her waist, and drew her attention to a dim shape which was beginning to appear in front of us, and which gradually developed into the indistinct outlines of forest-covered hills and deep wooded valleys, in which we caught occasional glimpses of what looked like threads of molten silver, which were evidently rivers.

In a few moments we passed over the shore itself. There was a little port with some shipping, I saw a steamer flying the Russian flag. We passed within a hundred yards of her. Though there were plenty of passengers upon the deck, not a soul took the slightest notice of us.

"That's a very curious thing," I remarked to my wife, as the steamer disappeared in the distance. "We must have become invisible."

"Then that accounts for my not feeling seasick," replied Rosa, unconsequently.

A large city suddenly appeared beneath us, only to disappear again. I caught a glimpse of great blue domes and tall white minarets. "Mosques, by Jove!" I cried. "Rosa, I said, exploratorily, "we're in Persia already! We must have just crossed the Caspian. That would account for that Russian steamer. The country is a bit monotonous, isn't it?" I added, gazing down at the panorama of forest and jungle that seemed to be

flowing at lightning speed beneath us. "I hope we shall clear those mountain tops," I cried, as I observed a vast range of rocky mountains which seemed to be advancing menacingly towards us. "Hang the scenery!" I added. "It was safer up above; I wish we were back there."

mouth, an innumerable legion of weird and mysterious-looking beings became suddenly materialised. In some respects these creatures resembled humanity. They were winged giants of enormous size. Six of the biggest of them clutched the two longer edges of the little carpet with one

"The sensation was decidedly pleasant, all the same"

In an instant the carpet seemed to swerve. The rushing sound of wings grew almost deafening, and we were in the blue empyrean once more. Then the whole thing suddenly dawned upon me. *It was the carpet of Solomon!*

"I wish we could see the—well, the locomotive," I muttered.

The instant the words were out of my

claw like hand. The other was stretched out and clasped by that of another monster, and so on. And we saw that we were being borne through space by six lines of flying giants, each line, owing to its vast length, actually disappearing in the distance. As far as our vision could reach we gazed along the six interminable ranks of flying giants, which tapered off

into the far distance, and seemed towards the extremities but as a disappearing line of migratory birds.

"George," cried Rosa, clinging very tightly to me—"Oh, George, they're bogies!"

"Not a bit of it, my dear," I said soothingly. "They are but *jinns*, the winged spirits of the air. The slaves of Solomon Chaps you read about in the *Arabian Nights*, you know. Solomon bottled one, don't you remember? And they are a very obedient lot," I added; "each chap is doing his level best."

And then we looked at the terrific faces of the flying giants. They were a very miscellaneous crowd, but each spirit was of a fierce and forbidding aspect. They had large eyes, shaggy hair, with enormous moustachios, huge ears and teeth. There were black spirits, white spirits, and brown spirits, whose colour gave them a semi-human appearance, but there were also red, green and blue monsters, and parti coloured ones as well, and some with heads like dogs, lions and bears; but one ultramarine-coloured gentleman with yellow dots, and vermilion hair, was distinctly comic. He struck me much as an *édition de luxe* of a favourite Jack-in-the-box I had possessed when a boy. But he didn't squeak—not he. Not a man jack of them, if I may be pardoned the expression, uttered a sound. But they were evidently flying all they knew, and great drops of perspiration continually fell from their outstretched chins.

"Rosa," said I, assuming the tone of the late Mr. Barlow, "we should always approach things in a scientific spirit. We now know the real cause of thunder showers."

But Rosa was genuinely alarmed. She clung to me very tightly indeed.

"I wish they would go back into invisibility," I cried, "for your sake."

The words were hardly out of my mouth, when all instantly disappeared. But we knew they were there all the same. We could still hear the synchronous beating of their huge wings.

"I feel better," said Rosa—"much better."

"We must be nearly there by now," I said, "considering the speed at which we have come."

I was right. As rapidly as we had risen, we now descended.

It seemed rather oppressively hot, and as we dropped towards the earth the vast domes and minarets of a great Eastern city appeared to flash past us, as, gently and softly, the frouzy little carpet sank to earth, and we found ourselves carefully deposited beneath a vast plane tree in a shady little dell, while a gurgling brooklet babbled at our feet. The air was heavy with the scent of moss roses—so pungent was the odour as to be almost unpleasant; the song of nightingales could be heard in every direction, and we both looked round in astonishment upon the babbling brook, and the deep and varied green shades of the thickly planted jungle forest of ornamental trees. Great masses of bright glossy green foliage, interspersed with tufts of deep scarlet and yellow, were a puzzle to me at first, but Rosa told me they were pomegranate blossoms.

"I'm quite, quite sure of it, George," she said, "for I had pomegranate blossoms in my last winter bonnet. They were French flowers, George, and horribly expensive."

There was no gainsaying evidence such as this. Besides, on examination, we saw great quantities of the young fruit hanging on the trees. Of orange trees there were literally thousands, covered with a profusion of the fruit, as yet of a deep dark green. But before we had time to make closer investigation into the nature of the grateful shade, which surrounded us on all sides but one, a very old man in a long blue cloth coat, trimmed with tarnished silver lace, and wearing a turban, suddenly made his appearance.

My wife gave a shriek of terror, and clutched me by the arm. "Oh, George," she said, "it's the wicked magician himself!"

II.

My wife was beside herself with terror at the appearance of the old man she suspected of being what she had termed "the wicked magician himself."

I reassured her at once. "He's a great deal too polite, my dear, for a wicked magician."

The old man had already commenced a long succession of bows. "*Salaam, Sahib*," he said, "*Salaam, Sahib!*" And then he went on bowing like an Eastern Sir Pertinax MacSycophant.

I only know one Oriental word, and I used it at once. "*Bismillah*," I said majestically.

It was evidently the right word to use at this particular juncture, for it unlocked the floodgates of the old man's eloquence, and he fired off a long speech in what was probably very choice Persian, not one syllable of which did I understand. And then he retired to a little distance, at our feet, inviting us by an expressive pantomime to lose no time, but to fall to at once. I suppose pantomime comes to us all by nature. The old man's was perfectly intelligible to both of us. He did exactly as Mr. Merriman does at Christmas: he gave a broad grin, he

"She put spoonful after spoonful of lemon-water ice into the Prince's mouth"

only to return with a great basket of woven twigs, looking like an enormous bird's nest, containing at least a hundred of the most magnificent apricots I ever saw in my life. They were packed in and set off by handfuls of pink rosebleaves, just as we pack our plovers' eggs in moss. The old man harangued me once more, and with a low obeisance placed the fruit pointed to the fruit, and then he commenced to rub his—well, his gastric region—with a rapid circular movement.

Rosa at once misinterpreted him.

"Don't touch them, George!" she cried. "He's evidently warning you. He means that if you eat them they'll make you horribly ill. Perhaps they're poisoned, or, worse still, enchanted, and

if we eat them we may turn into something dreadful."

"My dear Rosa," I said, "you don't understand him. Look at his smile, observe how he smacks his lips. Why, his very mouth seems to water. He means that they're uncommonly good—that's what he means."

I took up one of the apricots. It was so ripe that it came in half in my hand, and the stone dropped out.

"Don't be afraid, Rosa!" I cried. "They're delicious. Even if I were to be turned into an ourang outang I would do my best to finish the basket."

Never before or since had either of us tasted such apricots as these. The gardener, for he evidently was a gardener, knelt down at my feet and reverently removed my slippers. Somewhat to my astonishment, he now began to gently and scientifically knead my feet with his skilful fingers. The sensation was delightful.

"Oh, George," said my wife, warningly, "perhaps he is preparing you for the awful punishment of the bastinado?"

"Not a bit of it, my dear; he's only shampooing me."

I knew, for I had been to the Turkish bath in the Savoy. But the old gentleman with the beard was a far more skilful operator than any of the men who had performed upon me in London.

"I could sit here, Rosa, by your side, eating these delicious apricots and gazing into your eyes for ever, if this delightful old man would only go on rubbing my feet."

The old gentleman, however, soon considered that he had done sufficient for me; and he turned round to my wife, with the evident desire to perform the same kind office for her, but the idea frightened her, for she gave a little timid scream.

The old man shook his head and laughed, and then he retired for a moment behind a clump of trees, only to return bearing a rather elaborate kind of banjo, which he proceeded to tune with considerable skill. He ran his fingers over the strings in a sort of prelude, as he knelt upon the ground at our feet, and then he burst into something distinctly resembling an air; there was no particular tune about it, but a good deal of melody. My wife and I both admire Wagner, and we thoroughly appreciated the old man's performance. Then he began to sing, at first in a low, crooning, melancholy manner; then he put more and more force into his performance, as he strummed away upon his banjo like instrument. He stuck his head upon one side, and his face got gradually redder and redder, his eyes seemed to be starting from his head with his exertions, while the muscles of his neck stood out like straining cordage. He shrieked and shouted, and the innumerable nightingales who hopped about, tame as sparrows, in every direction around us, joined in the chorus. I verily believe, if he'd gone on much longer, that something dreadful would have happened to him, but he suddenly ceased, and sprang to his feet, and we heard a noise of confused shouting, the trampling of horses, and a furious knocking, as if at a door. The old gardener made us a low bow and hurried away.

What could it all mean? An arrival, evidently. We were not kept long in suspense. Rosa, in her terror, seized my hand. I attempted to calm her fears, and presently a little procession appeared. The old gardener was walking backwards, and making profound obeisances to some great personage, who was followed by a large suite of gaily-dressed attendants.

The personage was young and good-looking. At first, from the likeness, I thought it was the late Shah himself, for I had seen him in England, at the Crystal Palace, but the young prince, for such he evidently was, was not more than two-and-thirty, and I guessed him to be one of the late King's sons. A small hat of black curly lambskin was cocked knowingly upon his head, he wore a European shirt and collar, and a pink satin tie. A sky blue silk jerkin, embroidered in colours with fuchsias and geraniums, was girdled by a black leather belt, the buckle of which was composed of a diamond ornament the size of a cheese plate, the centre of it being a single stone as big as a walnut, of unusual brilliancy. A sort of overcoat of priceless Cashmerean shawl, trimmed with the fur of the blue fox, was worn over the jerkin; and the young prince had on the widest pair of light tawn unmentionables, with enormous gold stripes, that an Oriental tailor could devise. This strange costume was completed by a pair of shiny dancing pumps with silver buckles, and snowy white socks.

The attendants formed a half-circle at a discreet distance from us. Two of them rapidly placed a magnificent carpet just addressed me in fluent but exceedingly bad French.

"You are very welcome indeed, un-

"The venerable old gentleman shrieked and struggled"

in front of our poor old rug, upon which the prince, for he was evidently a prince, proceeded to squat, sitting upon his heels, as is the Eastern custom, and then he believer," he said gushingly, as he helped himself to one of our apricots. "I little thought when I came to this garden"—and here he leered most offensively at

Rosa—"that I should find two such pleasant, two such delightful cup-companions. Make yourselves quite at home, I beg. These dogs," he said, with a comprehensive gesture at his following, "don't understand French. You do, of course?"

I nodded, for had I not been to Boulogne for a fortnight only a year before?

"What beautiful expressive eyes he's got!" said Rosa to me in a whisper. "And oh, George, I do wonder if those stones in his belt are real?"

"Delicious maiden," he continued, "you've made roast meat of my heart. Kindly communicate to your companion," he said to me, "that I and all I have are hers. Nay," he continued, "kindly explain to her that the nightingale is about to express his affection for her."

He seized the old gardener's banjo-like instrument, and proceeded to strum it lustily. Here was a horrible position for a young married man! Not an hour ago I was happy in my peaceful little home in Maida Vale, and monarch of all I surveyed. And now I was sitting in the power of an Eastern despot,—and was ordered by him to inform my young and innocent wife that she had inspired him with a horrible passion.

"My dear," I said, "be calm. This young gentleman is a person of weak intellect. He thinks he can sing. Don't undeceive him; try to bear with him, Rosa, if you can, for such persons, when irritated, are dangerous."

And then he began to strum and to shriek, to howl and to scream, and to get red in the face, exactly as the old gardener had done before him, and began to sing as follows, with a hateful Oriental accent and faulty grammar which I suppose he looked on as poetic license:

Tu es plus jolie que la rose du Mai,
Beaucoup plus jolie, blanche comme le lait.
Bel enfant, je suis gai,
Gai, gai, gai, comme le rossignol.
Je suis gai, comme le rossignol!
Fi le ros ignol, le lean rossignol,
Il aime la rose!

Here he gave a hideous ogle, and I thanked my stars that Rosa did not understand a word of French.

"J'aime la rose!
Féridon, feridon, féridon, feridaine,
Je serai roi,
Tu seras reine,
Feridon, feridon, feridon, féridaine!"

The wretch took an encore, without being asked for it, throwing in a series of winks and ogles; and then it suddenly dawned upon Rosa that the royal scapegrace was making violent love to her.

"George," said my wife, "if he wasn't so terribly good looking, his performance would be unbearable. What loving, lustrous eyes he has! His mother must have been a very beautiful woman."

Now, I have noticed that when Rosa wants to suggest that a man is very good-looking, she always artfully does it by making this ridiculous reference to his mother.

"Bother his mother!" said I, with irritation.

"What does she think of that?" said the Prince, as he gave his final eldritch shriek.

It was exactly like a reminiscence of my childhood—the early summer cry of those woebegone men who, at the full pitch of their lungs, desired to know if you required any ornaments for your firestoves. But I am a well-bred man. I know that excessive politeness is a duty towards the great.

"It is beautiful, my Prince. We never heard anything like it in our lives before," I said, with a bow.

"Yes," he replied, swallowing my praise as his lawful due, and pulling up his shirt collar; "but it's very fatiguing, though."

Here he clapped his hands.

Three servants appeared, each one carrying a small silver tray and a valuable porcelain punch-bowl. Each punch-bowl contained an immense conical lemon-water ice, at least two feet high. They placed one of these Gargantuan delicacies in front of the Prince, the others were placed before Rosa and myself. We each seized a teaspoon, and we all three fell-to like wolves.

"I have eaten a shilling ice," said Rosa to me in a whisper, "at Whiteley's; but these must be at least five-guinea ones. How very liberal of the Prince! He's charming!"

And then the Prince did a very extraordinary thing. He had gradually got a great deal nearer to Rosa than I liked. He suddenly placed his hand upon his heart, and opened his mouth to its fullest extent, just as young thrushes do when expecting the arrival of the parent bird.

"Poor fellow," said Rosa, "he must

" In an instant we were once more in the blue empyrean "

have injured himself by his exertions." And she looked down his throat in quite a professional manner.

"Tell her to feed me," said the Prince to me in French. "Tell the bright lodestar of my existence, tell the full moon of perfection to feed me," he repeated, in an imperious manner.

"He wants you to feed him, Rosa," I translated. "He wants you to put spoonfuls of your ice into his mouth. It's highly improper," I continued, "but I think you'd better do it, Rosa. Heaven knows to what lengths he may proceed if you refuse."

Here I thought of the awful punishment of the bastinado, and I looked around in vain for my slippers.

Poor Rosa turned pale. She put spoonful after spoonful of lemon-water ice into the Prince's mouth, but still this Eastern Oliver asked for more, and opened his mouth wider than ever.

Suddenly Rosa gave a little scream. "George!" she cried: "the wretch has squeezed my hand."

And he had.

At this moment I saw the face of a venerable old man, with a beard a foot and a half long, peeping at our little party from behind an immense bush of moss-roses. I drew Rosa's attention to the fact. As I did so, the head caught the Prince's eye.

"That is my Prime Vizier," he said in his execrable French. "He dares to intrude upon my privacy. You shall now see the punishment of curiosity; it will amuse you."

Then the Prince clapped his hands vehemently. A crowd of courtiers appeared as if by magic, and he gave an order in Persian in a loud and angry voice.

Two ferocious-looking men in red coats, bearing a pole some six feet long, from which a noose depended, rushed forward, followed by a man carrying a great bundle of long sticks, each as thick as one's thumb. Four hulking fellows clutched the venerable old gentleman, threw him on the ground, tore off his shoes and socks, placed his feet in the noose, and then each seizing a stick began to lay on upon his bare soles with all their might and main. The venerable old gentleman shrieked and struggled. The courtiers stood in a semicircle, just as the chorus does in a comic opera, each man with his arms folded across his chest and smiling blandly.

As the sticks were splintered into fragments new ones were seized and used vigorously. The Prince, with a smile at Rosa which made my flesh creep, took up the banjo-like instrument and began playing a merry air. He was evidently proud of the dreadful exhibition.

"I can't bear it," screamed Rosa. "They'll kill the poor dear old gentleman."

"I'm hanged if I stand it any longer!" I cried. "If he bastinadoes me, or even blows me from a gun, I will remonstrate with him. I heartily wish we were back in Maida Vale again."

In an instant we were once more in the blue empyrean, and as quickly as we had gone to Persia, we returned to Rosa's pretty little drawing room in "Ye Snuggerie."

We sat and stared at each other. Could it have been a dream?

But no: a curiously carved and very solid silver teaspoon was in each of our right hands, numerous apricot stones were upon the little carpet, and my slippers are no doubt treasured by the Persian Prince as the only remembrance he possesses of the visit to Persia of the young married lady whom he had the impertinence to call the lodestar of his existence and the full moon of perfection.

Our friends will never believe this story. But anyhow you can come to "Ye Snuggerie" and see the silver teaspoons any day, if you like, and my wife has had the apricot stones set in silver as a bracelet.

I wish that I still possessed King Solomon's carpet. I should have it still, and it was decidedly cheap at four guineas, if it hadn't been for the stupidity of our little housemaid. When we went into the drawing room that evening to examine it once more, it was gone. I rang the bell excitedly, the housemaid appeared.

"Where is the carpet, Mary?" I exclaimed.

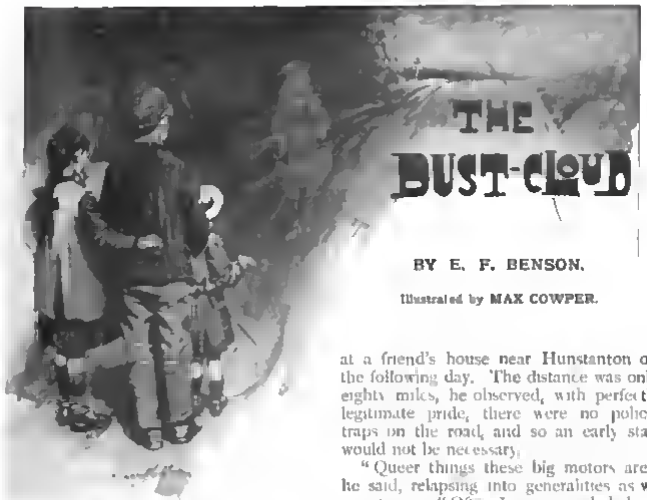
"If you please, sir, there was no orders about it, and Mr. Lazarus' young man have took it back."

I never could get that shabby old carpet out of Mr. Lazarus.

My slippers are still in Persia!

When I tell this true story, people say that I have a perfervid imagination. I wish I had: I would make it pay.

"I heard a wild, frightened shriek . . . Then we entered the dust cloud."



THE DUST-CLOUD

BY E. F. BENSON.

Illustrated by MAX COWPER.

THE big French windows were open on to the lawn, and, dinner being over, two or three of the party who were staying for the week at the end of August with the Combe-Martins had strolled out on to the terrace to look at the sea, over which the moon, large and low, was just rising and tracing a path of pale gold from horizon to shore, while others, less lunar of inclination, had gone in search of bridge or billiards. Coffee had come round immediately after dessert, and the end of dinner, according to the delectable custom of the house, was as informal as the end of breakfast. Every one, that is to say, remained or went away, smoked, drank port or abstained, according to his personal tastes. Thus, on this particular evening it so happened that Harry Combe-Martin and I were very soon left alone in the dining-room, because we were talking unmitigated motor "shop," and the rest of the party (small wonder) were bored with it, and had left us. The shop was home-shop, so to speak, for it was almost entirely concerned with the manifold perfections of the new six-cylinder Napier which my host in a moment of extravagance, which he did not in the least regret, had just purchased; in which, too, he proposed to take me over to lunch at a friend's house near Hunstanton on the following day. The distance was only eighty miles, he observed, with perfectly legitimate pride, there were no police-traps on the road, and so an early start would not be necessary.

"Queer things these big motors are," he said, relapsing into generalities as we rose to go. "Often I can scarcely believe that my new car is merely a machine. It seems to me to possess an independent life of its own. It is really much more like a thoroughbred with a wonderfully fine mouth."

"And the moods of a thoroughbred?" I asked.

"No; it's got an excellent temper, I'm glad to say. It doesn't mind being checked, or even stopped, when it's going its best. Some of these big cars can't stand that. They get sulky—I assure you it is literally true—if they are checked too often."

He paused on his way to ring the bell. "Guy Elphinstone's car, for instance," he said: "it was a bad-tempered brute, a violent, vicious beast of a car."

"What make?" I asked.

"Twenty-five horse-power Amedée. They are a fretful strain of car, too thin, not enough bone—and bone is very good for the nerves. The brute liked running over a chicken or a rabbit, though perhaps it was less the car's ill-temper than Guy's, poor chap. Well, he paid for it—he paid to the uttermost farthing. Did you know him?"

"No, but surely I have heard the name. Ah, yes, he ran over a child, did he not?"

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"Yes," said Harry, "and then smashed up against his own park gates."

"Killed, wasn't he?"

"Oh yes, killed instantly, and the car just a heap of splinters. There's an odd story about it, I'm told, in the village: rather in your line."

"Ghosts?" I asked.

"Yes, the ghost of his motor-car Seems almost too up-to-date, doesn't it?"

"And what's the story?" I demanded.

"Why, just this His place was outside the village of Bircham, ten miles out from Norwich, and there's a long straight bit of road there—that's where he ran over the child—and a couple of hundred yards farther a rather awkward turn into the park gates. Well, a month or two ago, soon after the accident, one old gaffer in the village swore he had seen a motor there coming full tilt along the road, but without a sound, and it disappeared at the lodge gates of the park, which were shut. Soon after another said he had heard a motor whirl by him at the same place, followed by a hideous scream, but saw nothing."

"The scream is rather horrible," said I.

"Ah, I see what you mean! I only thought of his syren. Guy had a syren on his exhaust, same as I have His had a dreadful frightened sort of wail, and always made me feel creepy."

"And is that all the story?" I asked: "that one old man thought he saw a noiseless motor, and another thought he heard an invisible one?"

Harry flicked the ash off his cigarette into the grate "Oh dear no!" he said. "Half a dozen of them have seen something or heard something. It is quite a heavily authenticated yarn."

"Yes, and talked over and edited in the public-house," I said.

"Well, not a man of them will go there after dark. Also the lodge-keeper gave notice a week or two afterwards. He said he was always hearing a motor stop and hoot outside the lodge, and he was kept running out at all hours of the night to see what it was."

"And what was it?"

"It wasn't anything Simply nothing there. He thought it rather uncanny, anyhow, and threw up a good post. Besides, his wife was always hearing a child scream, and while her man toddled out to the gate she would go and see whether the kids were all right. And the kids themselves——"

"Ah, what of them?" I asked

"They kept coming to their mother, asking who the little girl was who walked up and down the road and would not speak to them or play with them."

"It's a many sided story," I said "All the witnesses seem to have heard and seen different things"

"Yes, that is just what to my mind makes the yarn so good," he said "Personally I don't take much stock in spooks at all But given that there are such things as spooks, and given that the death of the child and the death of Guy have caused spooks to play about there, it seems to me a very good point that different people should be aware of different phenomena One hears the car, another sees it, one hears the child scream, another sees the child. How does that strike you?"

This, I am bound to say, was a new view to me, and the more I thought of it the more reasonable it appeared. For the vast majority of mankind have all those occult senses by which is perceived the spiritual world (which, I hold, is thick and populous around us), sealed up, as it were: in other words, the majority of mankind never hear or see a ghost at all. Was it not, then, very probable that of the remainder—those, in fact, to whom experiences have happened or can happen—few should have every sense unsealed, but that some should have the unsealed ear, others the unsealed eye—that some should be clairaudient, others clairvoyant?

"Yes, it strikes me as reasonable," I said. "Can't you take me over there?"

"Certainly! If you will stop till Friday I'll take you over on Thursday The others all go that day, so that we can get there after dark."

I shook my head "I can't stop till Friday, I'm afraid," I said "I must leave on Thursday But how about to-morrow? Can't we take it on the way to or from Hunstanton?"

"No, it's thirty miles out of our way. Besides, to be at Bircham after dark means that we shouldn't get back here till midnight And as host to my guests——"

"Ah! things are only heard and seen after dark, are they?" I asked "That makes it so much less interesting It is like a séance where all lights are put out"

"Well, the accident happened at night," he said. "I don't know the rules, but that may have some bearing on it, I should think."

I had one question more in the back of my mind, but I did not like to ask it. At least, I wanted information on this subject without appearing to ask for it.

"Neither do I know the rules of motors," I said; "and I don't understand you when you say that Guy Elphinstone's machine was an irritable, cross-grained brute, that liked running over chickens and rabbits. But I think you subsequently said that the irritability may have been the irritability of its owner. Did he mind being checked?"

"It made him blind-mad if it happened often," said Harry. "I shall never forget a drive I had with him once: there were hay-carts and perambulators every hundred yards. It was perfectly ghastly; it was like being with a madman. And when we got inside his gate, his dog came running out to meet him. He went straight over it: it was more than that—he went for it, just grinding his teeth with rage. I never drove with him again."

He stopped a moment. "I say, you mustn't think—you mustn't think——" he began.

"No, of course not," said I.

Harry Combe Martin's house stood close to the weather-eaten, sandy cliffs of the Suffolk shore, which are being incessantly gnawed away by the hunger of the insatiable sea. Fathoms deep below it, and now many hundred yards out, lies what was once the second port in England; but now of the ancient town of Dunwich, and of its seven great churches, nothing remains but one, and that ruinous and already half destroyed by the falling cliff and the encroachments of the sea. Foot by foot it, too, is disappearing, and of the graveyard which surrounded it more than half is gone, so that from the face of the sandy cliff on which it stands there stick out like straws in glass, as Dante says, the bones of those who were once committed there to the kindly and stable earth.

Whether it was the remembrance of this rather grim spectacle as I had seen it that afternoon, or whether Harry's story had caused some trouble in my brain, or whether it was merely that the keen bracing air of this place, to one who had just come from the sleepy languor of the Norfolk Broads, kept me sleepless, I do not know; but, anyhow, the moment I put out my light that night and got into bed, I felt that all the footlights and gas-jets in the internal theatre of my mind sprang into flame, and that I was very vividly and alertly awake. It was in vain that I counted a hundred forwards and a hundred backwards, that I pictured to myself a flock of visionary sheep coming singly through a gap in an imaginary hedge, and tried to number their monotonous and uniform countenances, that I played noughts and crosses with myself, that I marked out scores of double lawn-tennis courts,—for with each repetition of these supposedly soporific exercises I only became more intensely wakeful. It was not in remote hope of sleep that I continued to repeat these weary performances long after their inefficacy was proved to the hilt, but because I was strangely unwilling in this timeless hour of the night to think about those protruding relics of humanity. Also I quite distinctly did not desire to think about that subject with regard to which I had, a few hours ago, promised Harry that I would not make it the subject of reflection. For these reasons I continued during the black hours to practise these narcotic exercises of the mind, knowing well that if I paused on the tedious treadmill my thoughts, like some released spring, would fly back to rather gruesome subjects. I kept my mind, in fact, talking loud to itself, so that it should not hear what other voices were saying.

Then by degrees these absurd mental occupations became impossible; my mind simply refused to occupy itself with them any longer; and next moment I was thinking intently and eagerly, not about the bones protruding from the gnawed section of sand cliff, but about the subject I had said I would not dwell upon. And like a flash it came upon me why Harry had bidden me not think about it. Surely in order that I should not come to the same conclusion as he had come to.

Now the whole question of "haunt"—haunted spots, haunted houses, and so forth—has always seemed to me to be utterly unsolved, and to be neither proved nor disproved to a satisfactory degree. From the earliest times, certainly from the earliest known Egyptian records, there has been a belief that the scene of a crime is often revisited, sometimes by the spirit of him who has committed

"'It was perfectly ghastly! It was like being with a madman. I never drove with him again."

child, a sulky child. Yes—perhaps. But perhaps not. Then after this preliminary skirmish I found myself settling down to the question that I had said I would not think about, in other words, the possible origin of these phenomena interested me more than the phenomena themselves. For what exactly had Guy Elphinstone, that savage driver, done? Had or had not the death of the child been entirely an accident, a thing (given he drove a motor at all) outside his own control? Or had he, irritated beyond endurance at the checks and delays of the day, not pulled up when it was just possible he might have, but run over the child as he it—seeking rest, we must suppose, and finding none, sometimes, and more inexplicably, by the spirit of his victim, crying perhaps, like the blood of Abel, for vengeance. And though the stories of these village gossips in the alehouse about noiseless visions and invisible noises were all as yet unsifted and unreliable, yet I could not help wondering if they (such as they were) pointed to something authentic and to be classed under this head of appearances. But more striking than the yarns of the gaffers seemed to me the question of the lodge keeper's children. How should children have imagined the figure of a child that would not speak to them or play with them? Perhaps it was a real would have run over a rabbit or a hen, or even his own dog? And what, in any case, poor wretched brute, must have been his thoughts in that terrible instant that intervened between the child's death and his own, when a moment later he smashed into the closed gates of his own lodge? Was remorse his—bitter, despairing contrition? That could hardly have been so, or else surely, knowing only for certain that he had knocked a child down, he would have stopped; he

would have done his best, whatever that might be, to repair the irreparable harm. But he had not stopped—he had gone on, it seemed, at full speed, for on the collision the car had been smashed into matchwood and steel shavings. Again, with double force, had this dreadful thing been a complete accident, he would have stopped. So then—most terrible question of all—had he, after making murder, rushed on to what proved to be his own death, filled with some hellish glee at what he had done? Indeed, as in the churchyard on the cliff, bones of the buried stuck starkly out into the night.

The pale tired light of earliest morning had turned the window-blinds into glimmering squares before I slept; and when I woke, the servant who called me was already rattling them briskly up on their rollers, and letting the calm serenity of the August day stream into the room. Through the open windows poured in sunlight and sea-wind, the scent of flowers and the song of birds; and each and all were wonderfully reassuring, banishing the hooded forms that had haunted the night, and I thought of the disquietude of the dark hours as a traveller may think of the billows and tempests of the ocean over which he has safely journeyed, unable, now that they belong to the limbo of the past, to recall his qualms and tossings with any vivid uneasiness. Not without a feeling of relief, too, did I dwell on the knowledge that I was definitely not going to visit this equivocal spot. Our drive to-day, as Harry had said, would not take us within thirty miles of it, and to-morrow I but went to the station and away. Though a thorough-paced seeker after truth might, no doubt, have regretted that the laws of time and space did not permit him to visit Bircham after the sinister dark had fallen, and test whether for him there was visible or audible truth in the tales of the village gossips, I was conscious of no such regret. Bircham and its fables had given me a very bad night, and I was perfectly aware that I did not in the least want to go near it, though yesterday I had quite truthfully said I should like to do so. In this brightness, too, of sun and sea wind at my waking moments I felt none of the *malaise* which a sleepless night usually gives me; I felt particularly well, particularly pleased to be alive, and also, as I have said, particularly content not to be going to Bircham. I was quite satisfied to leave my curiosity unsatisfied.

The motor came round about half past ten, and we started at once, Harry and Mrs. Morrison, a cousin of his, sitting behind in the big back seat, large enough to hold a comfortable three, and I on the left of the driver, in a sort of trance—I am not ashamed to confess it—of expectancy and delight. I did not want to drive, any more than Harry wanted to; for driving, so I hold, is too absorbing; it takes the attention in too firm a grip: the mania of the true motorist is not consciously enjoyed. For the passion for motors is a taste—I had almost said a gift—as distinct and as keenly individual as the passion for music or mathematics. Those who use motors most (merely as a means of getting rapidly from one place to another) are often entirely without it, while those whom adverse circumstances (over which they have no control) compel to use them least may have it to a supreme degree. To those who have it, analysis of their passion is perhaps superfluous; to those who have it not, explanation is almost unintelligible. Pace, however, and the control of pace, and above all the sensuous consciousness of pace, is at the root of it, and pleasure in pace is common to most people, whether it be in the form of a galloping horse, or the pace of the skate hissing over smooth ice, or the pace of a free-wheel bicycle humming down hill, or, more impersonally, the pace of the smashed ball at lawn tennis, the driven ball at golf, or the low boundary hit at cricket. But the sensuous consciousness of pace, as I have said, is needful: one might experience it seated in front of the engine of an express train, though not in a wadded, shut windowed carriage, where the wind of movement is not felt. Then add to this rapture of the rush through riven air the knowledge that huge relentless force is controlled by a little lever, and directed by a little wheel on which the hands of the driver seem to lie so negligently. A great untamed devil has there his bridle, and he answers to it, as Harry had said, like a horse with a fine mouth. He has hunger and thirst, too, unslakeable, and greedily he laps of his soup of petrol which turns to fire

in his mouth · electricity, the force that rends clouds asunder, and causes towers to totter, is the spoon with which he feeds himself, and as he eats he races onward, and the road opens like torn linen in front of him. Yet how obedient, how amenable is he!—for with a touch on his snaffle his speed is redoubled, or melts into thin air, so that before you know you have touched the rein he has exchanged his swallow-flight for a mere saunter through the lanes. But he ever loves to run; and knowing this, you will bid him lift up his voice and tell those who are in his path that he is coming, so that he will not need the touch that checks. Hoarse and jovial is his voice, hooting to the wayfarer; and if his hooting be not heard he has a great guttural falsetto scream that leaps from octave to octave, and echoes from the hedges that are passing in blurred lines of hanging green. And, as you go, the romantic isolation of divers in deep seas is yours; masked and hooded companions may be near you also, in their driving dress for this plunge through the swift tides of air: but you, like them, are alone and isolated, conscious only of the ripped riband of road, the two great lantern-eyes of the wonderful monster that look through drooped eyelids by day, but gleam with fire by night, the two ear-laps of splash-boards, and the long lean bonnet in front which is the skull and brain-case of that swift, untiring energy that feeds on fire, and whirls its two tons of weight up hill and down dale, as if some new law as everlasting as gravity, and like gravity making it go ever swifter, was its sole control.

For the first hour the essence of these joys, any description of which compared to the real thing is but as a stagnant pond compared to the bright rushing of a mountain stream, was mine. A straight switchback road lay in front of us, and the monster plunged silently down hill, and said below his breath, "Ha-ha—ha ha—ha ha,' as, without diminution of speed, he breasted the opposing slope. In my control were his great vocal chords, and it rejoiced me to let him hoot to a pony-cart, three hundred yards ahead, with a hand on his falsetto scream if his ordinary tones of conversation were unheard or disregarded. Then came a road crossing ours at right angles, and the dear monster seemed to say, "Yes, yes—see how obedient and careful I am. I stroll with my hands in my pockets." Then again a puppy from a farmhouse staggered warlike into the road, and the monster said, "Poor little chap! get home to your mother, or I'll talk to you in earnest." The poor little chap did not take the hint, so the monster slackened speed and just said, "Whoof!" Then it chuckled to itself as the puppy scuttled into the hedge, seriously alarmed; and next moment our self-made wind screeched and whistled round us again.

Napoleon, I believe, said that the power of an army lay in its feet. that is true also of the monster. There was a loud bang, and in thirty seconds we were at a standstill. The monster's off fore-foot troubled it, and the chauffeur said, "Yes, sir,—burst."

So the burst boot was taken off and a new one put on, a boot that had never been on foot before. The foot in question was held up on a jack during this operation, and the new boot laced up with a pump. This took exactly twenty-five minutes. Then the monster got his spoon going again, and said, "Let me run—oh, let me run!" And for fifteen miles on a straight and empty road it ran. I timed the miles, but shall not produce their chronology for the benefit of a forsworn constabulary.

But there were no more dithyrambics that morning. We should have reached Hunstanton in time for lunch. Instead, we waited to repair our fourth puncture at 1.45 p.m., and twenty-five miles short of our destination. This fourth puncture was caused by a spicule of flint three-quarters of an inch long—sharp, it is true, but weighing perhaps two pennyweights, while we weighed two tons. It seemed an impertinence. So we lunched at a wayside inn, and during lunch the pundits held a consultation, of which the upshot was this:

We had no more boots for our monster, for his off fore-foot had burst once, and punctured once (thus necessitating two soles and one boot). Similarly, but more so, his off hind-foot had burst twice (thus necessitating two boots and two soles). Now, there was no certain shoemaker's shop at Hunstanton, as far as we knew, but there was a regular universal store at King's Lynn, which was about equidistant.

And, so said the chauffeur, there was something wrong with the monster's spoon

(ignition), and he didn't rightly know what, and therefore it seemed the prudent part not to go to Hunstanton (lunch, a thing of the preterite, having been the object), but to the well supplied King's Lynn. And we all breathed a pious hope that we might get there.

Whizz! hoot! purr! The last boot held, the spoon went busily to the monster's mouth, and we just flowed into King's Lynn. The return journey, so I vaguely gathered, would be made by other roads; but personally, intoxicated with air and movement, I neither asked nor desired to know what those roads would be. This one small but rather salient fact is necessary to record here, that as we waited at King's Lynn, and as we buzzed homewards afterwards, no thought of Bircham entered my head at all. The subsequent hallucination, if hallucination it was, was not, as far as I know, self-suggested. That we had gone out of our way for the sake of the garage, I knew, and that was all. Harry also told me that he did not know where our road would take us.

The rest that follows is the baldest possible narrative of what actually occurred. But it seems to me, a humble student of the occult, to be curious.

While we waited we had tea in a hotel looking on to a big empty square of houses, and after tea we waited a very long time for our monster to pick us up. Then the telephone inquired for "the gentleman on the motor," and since Harry had strolled out to get a local evening paper with news of the last Test Match, I applied ear and mouth to that elusive instrument. What I heard was not encouraging: the ignition had gone very wrong indeed, and "perhaps" in an hour we should be able to start. It was then about half-past six, and we were just seventy-eight miles from Dunwich.

Harry came back soon after this, and I told him what the message from the garage had been. What he said was this: "Then we shan't get back till long after dinner. We might just as well have camped out to see your ghost."

As I have already said, no notion of Bircham was in my mind, and I mention this as evidence that, even if it had been, Harry's remark would have implied that we were not going through Bircham.

The hour lengthened itself into an hour and a half. Then the monster, quite well again, came hooting round the corner, and we got in.

"Whack her up, Jack," said Harry to the chauffeur. "The roads will be empty. You had better light up at once."

The monster, with its eyes agleam, was whacked up, and never in my life have I been carried so cautiously and yet so swiftly. Jack never took a risk or the possibility of a risk, but when the road was clear and open he let the monster run just as fast as it was able. Its eyes made day of the road fifty yards ahead, and the romance of night was fairyland round us. Hares started from the roadside, and raced in front of us for a hundred yards, then just wheeled in time to avoid the ear-flaps of the great triumphant brute that carried us. Moths flitted across, struck sometimes by the lenses of its eyes, and the miles peeled over our shoulders. When It occurred we were going top speed. And this was It—quite unsensational, but to us quite inexplicable unless my mid night imaginings happened to be true.

As I have said, I was in command of the hooter and of the syren. We were flying along on a straight down grade, as fast as ever we could go, for the engines were working, though the decline was considerable. Then quite suddenly I saw in front of us a thick cloud of dust, and knew instinctively and on the instant, without thought or reasoning, what that must mean. Evidently something going very fast (or else so large a cloud could not have been raised) was in front of us, and going in the same direction as ourselves. Had it been something on the road coming to meet us, we should of course have seen the vehicle first and run into the dust-cloud afterwards. Had it, again, been something of low speed—a horse and dog-cart, for instance—no such dust could have been raised. But, as it was I knew at once that there was a motor travelling swiftly just ahead of us, also that it was not going as fast as we were, or we should have run into its dust much more gradually. But we went into it as into a suddenly lowered curtain.

Then I shouted to Jack. "Slow down, and put on the brake," I shrieked. "There's something just ahead of us."

As I spoke I wrought a wild concerto on the hooter, and with my right hand groped for the syren, but did not find it. Simultaneously I heard a wild, frightened shriek, just as if I had sounded the syren

myself. Jack had felt for it too, and our hands fingered each other. Then we entered the dust-cloud.

We slowed down with extraordinary speed, and still peering ahead we went dead slow through it. I had not put on my goggles after leaving King's Lynn, and the dust stung and smarted in my eyes. It was not, therefore, a belt of fog, but real road-dust. And at the moment we crept through it I felt Harry's hands on my shoulder.

"There's something just ahead," he said. "Look! don't you see the tail light?"

As a matter of fact, I did not; and, still going very slow, we came out of that dust-cloud. The broad empty road stretched in front of us; a hedge was on each side, and there was no turning either to right or left. Only, on the right, was a lodge, and gates which were closed. The lodge had no lights in any window.

Then we came to a standstill; the air was dead-calm, not a leaf in the hedgerow trees was moving, not a grain of dust was lifted from the road. But behind, the dust-cloud still hung in the air, and stopped dead-short at the closed lodge-gates. We had moved very slowly for the last hundred yards; it was difficult to suppose that it was of our making. Then Jack spoke, with a curious crack in his voice.

"It must have been a motor, sir," he said. "But where is it?"

I had no reply to this, and from behind another voice, Harry's voice, spoke. For the moment I did not recognise it, for it was strained and faltering.

"Did you open the syren?" he asked.

I tried to say "no," but could not. Simply no sound came.

Then we went on again. Soon we came to scattered lights in houses by the wayside.

"What's this place?" I asked Jack.

"Bircham, sir," said he.

The weather-eaten, sandy cliffs of the Suffolk shore

A GHOST-CHILD.

BY BERNARD CAPES.

IN making this confession public, I am aware that I am giving a butterfly to be broken on a wheel. There is so much of delicacy in its subject, that the mere resolve to handle it at all might seem to imply a lack of the sensitiveness necessary to its understanding; and it is certain that the more reverent the touch, the more irresistible will figure its opportunity to the common scepticism which is bondslave to its five senses. Moreover, one cannot, in the reason of things, write to publish for Anstarchus alone; but the gauntlet of Grub Street must be run in any bid for truth and sincerity.

On the other hand, to withhold from evidence, in these days of what one may call a zetetic psychology, anything which may appear elucidatory, however exquisitely and rarely, of our spiritual relationships, must be pronounced, I think, a sin against the Holy Ghost. All in all, therefore, I decide to give, with every passage to personal identification safeguarded, the story of a possession, or visitation, which is signified in the title to my narrative.

Tryphena was the sole orphaned representative of an obscure but gentle family which had lived for generations in the East of England. The spirit of the fens, of the long grey marshes, whose shores are the neutral ground of two elements, slumbered in her eyes. Looking into them, one seemed to see little beds of tiny green mosses luminous under water, or stirred by the movement of microscopic life in their midst. Secrets, one felt, were shadowed in their depths too frail and sweet for understanding. The pretty love-fancy of babies seen in the eyes of maidens, was in hers to be interpreted into the very cosmic dust of sea urchins, sparkling like chrysoberyls. Her soul looked out through them, as if they were the windows of a water-nursery.

She was always a child among children, in heart and knowledge most innocent, until Jason came and stood in her field of vision. Then, spirit of the neutral ground as she was, inclining to earth or water with the sway of the tides, she came wondering and dripping, as it were, to land, and took up her abode for final choice among the daughters of the earth. She knew her woman's estate, in fact, and the irresistible attraction of all completed perfections to the light that burns to destroy them.

Tryphena was not only an orphan, but an heiress. Her considerable estate was administered by her guardian, Jason's father, a widower, who was possessed of this single adored child. The fruits of parental infatuation had come early to ripen on the seedling. The boy was self-willed and perverse, the more so as he was naturally of a hot-hearted disposition. Violence and remorse would sway him in alternate moods, and be made, each in its turn, a self-indulgence. He took a delight in crossing his father's wishes, and no less in atoning for his gracelessness with moving demonstrations of affection.

Foremost of the old man's most cherished projects was, very naturally, a union between the two young people. He planned, manœuvred, spoke for it with all his heart of love and eloquence. And, indeed, it seemed at last as if his hopes were to be crowned. Jason returning from a lengthy voyage (for his enterprising spirit had early decided for the sea, and he was a naval officer) saw, and

was struck amazed before, the transformed vision of his old child playfellow. She was an opened flower whom he had left a green bud—a thing so rare and flawless that it seemed a sacrilege for earthly passions to converse of her. Familiarity, however, and some sense of reciprocal attraction, quickly dethroned that eucharist. Tryphena could blush, could thrill, could solicit, in the sweet ways of innocent womanhood. She loved him dearly, wholly, it was plain—had found the realisation of all her old formless dreams in this wondrous birth of a desire for one, in whose new-impassioned eyes she had known herself reflected hitherto only for the most patronised of small gossips. And, for her part, fearless as nature, she made no secret of her love. She was absorbed in, a captive to, Jason from that moment and for ever.

He responded. What man, however perverse, could have resisted, on first appeal, the attraction of such beauty, the flower of a radiant soul! The two were betrothed: the old man's cup of happiness was brimmed.

Then came clouds and a cold wind, chilling the garden of Hesperis. Jason was always one of those who, possessing classic noses, will cut them off, on easy provocation, to spite their faces. He was so proudly independent, to himself, that he resented the least assumption of proprietorship in him on the part of other people—even of those who had the best claim to his love and submission. This pride was an obsession. It stultified the real good in him, which was considerable. Apart from it, he was a good warm-tempered fellow, hasty but affectionate. Under its dominion, he would have broken his own heart on an imaginary grievance.

He found one, it is to be supposed, in the privileges assumed by love—in its exacting claims upon him—perhaps in its little unreasoning jealousies. He distorted these into an implied conceit of authority over him on the part of an heiress who was condescending to his meaner fortunes. The suggestion was quite base and without warrant, but pride has no balance. No doubt, moreover, the rather childish self-depreciations of the old man, his father, in his attitude towards a match he had so fondly desired, helped to aggravate this feeling. The upshot was that, when within a few months of the date which was to make his union with Tryphena eternal, Jason broke away from a restraint which his pride pictured to him as intolerable, and went on a yachting expedition with a friend.

Then, at once, and with characteristic violence, came the reaction. He wrote, impetuously, frenziedly, from a distant port, claiming himself Tryphena's, and Tryphena his, for ever and ever and ever. They were man and wife before God. He had behaved like an insensate brute, and he was at that moment starting to speed to her side, to beg her forgiveness and the return of her love.

He had no need to play the suitor afresh. She had never doubted or questioned their mutual bondage, and would have died a maid for his sake. Something of sweet exultation only seemed to quicken and leap in her body, that her faith in her dear love was vindicated.

But the joy came near to upset the reason of the old man, already tottering to its dotage; and what followed destroyed it utterly.

The yacht, flying home, was lost at sea, and Jason was drowned.

I once saw Tryphena about this time. She lived with her near mindless charge, lonely, in an old grey house upon the borders of a salt mere, and had little but the unearthly cries of sea-birds to answer to the questions of her widowed heart. She worked, sweet in charity, among the marsh folk, a beautiful unearthly presence, and was especially to be found where infants, and the troubles of child bearing women called for her help and sympathy. She was a wife herself, she would say quaintly, and some day, perhaps, by grace of the good spirits of the sea, would be a mother. None thought to cross her statement, put with so sweet a sanity; and, indeed, I have often noticed that the neighbourhood of great waters breeds in souls a mysticism which is remote from the very understanding of land dwellers.

How I saw her was thus. I was fishing, on a day of chill calm, in a dinghy off the flat coast. The stillness of the morning had tempted me some distance from the village where I was staying. Presently a sense of bad sport and healthy famine "plumped" in me, so to speak, for luncheon, and I looked about for a spot picturesque enough to add a zest to sandwiches, whisky and tobacco. Close by, a little creek or estuary ran up into a mere, between which and the sea lay a

cluster of low sand-hills, and thither I pulled. The spot, when I reached it, was calm, chill desolation manifest—lifeless water and lifeless sand, with no traffic between them but the dead interchange of salt. Low sedges, at first, and behind them fir woods were mirrored in the water at a distance, with an interval between me and them of sheeted glass, and right across this shining pool ran a dun half-drowned causeway, the sea path, it appeared, to and from a lonely house which I could just distinguish squatting among trees. It was Tryphena's home.

Now, paddling dispiritedly, I turned a cold dune, and saw a mermaid before me. At least, that was my instant impression. The creature sat coiled on the strand, combing her hair—that was certain, for I saw the gold-green tresses of it whisked by her action into rainbow threads. It appeared as certain that her upper half was flesh and her lower fish; and it was only on my nearer approach that this latter resolved itself into a pale green skirt, roped, owing to her posture, about her limbs, and the hem fanned out at her feet into a tail fin. Thus also her bosom, which had appeared naked, became a bodice, as near to her flesh in colour and texture as a smock is to a lady's-smock, which some call a cuckoo-flower.

It was plain enough now, yet the illusion for the moment had quite startled me.

As I came near, she paused in her strange business to canvass me. It was Tryphena herself, as after inquiry informed me. I have never seen so lovely a creature. Her eyes, as they regarded me passing, were something to haunt a dream so great in tragedy—not fathomless, but all in motion, it seemed, near their surfaces with green and rooted sorrows. They were the eyes, I thought, of an Undine late humanised, late awakened to the rapturous and troubled knowledge of the woman's burden. Her forehead was most fair, and the glistening thatch divided on it, like a golden cloud revealing the face of a wondering angel.

I passed, and a sand-heap stole my vision foot by foot. The vision was gone when I returned. I have reason to believe it was vouchsafed me within a few months of the coming of the ghost-child.

On the morning succeeding the night of the day on which Jason and Tryphena were to have been married, the girl came down from her bedroom with an extraordinary expression of still rapture on her face. After breakfast she took the old man into her confidence. She was childish still; her manner quite youthfully thrilling, but now there was a new born wonder in it that hovered on the pink of shame.

"Father! I have been under the deep waters and found him. He came to me last night in my dreams, so sobbing, so impassioned, to assure me that he had never really ceased to love me, though he had near broken his own heart pretending it. Poor boy! poor ghost! What could I do but take him to my arms? And all night he lay there, blest and forgiven, till in the morning he melted away with a sigh that woke me; and it seemed to me that I came up dripping from the sea."

"My boy! He has come back?" chuckled the old man. "What have you done with him, Tryphena?"

"I will hold him tighter the next time," she said.

But the spirit of Jason visited her dreams no more.

That was in March. In the Christmas following, when the mere was locked in stillness, and the reflected light of snow mingled on the ceiling with the red dance of firelight, one morning the old man came hurrying and panting to Tryphena's door. "Tryphena! Come down quickly! My boy, my Jason has come back! It was a lie that they told us about his being lost at sea!"

Her heart leapt like a candle flame. What new delusion of the old man's was this? She hurried over her dressing, and descended. A garrulous old voice mingled with a childish treble in the breakfast-room. Hardly breathing, she turned the handle of the door, and saw Jason before her.

But it was Jason the prattling babe of her first knowledge, Jason the flaxen-headed, apple-cheeked cherub of the nursery, Jason the confiding, the merry, the loving, before pride had come to warp his innocence. She fell on her knees to the child, and with a burst of ecstasy caught him to her heart.

She asked no question of the old man as to when or whence this apparition had come, or why he was here. For some reason she dared not. She accepted him as some waif, whom an accidental likeness had made glorious to their desolate home. As for the father, he was utterly satisfied and content. He had heard a knock at

the door, he said, and had opened it and found this. The child was naked, and his pink wet body glazed with ice. Yet he seemed insensible to the killing cold. It was Jason—that was enough. There is no date or time for imbecility. Its phantoms spring from the clash of ancient memories. This was just as actually his child as—more so, in fact, than—the grown young figure which, for all its manhood, had dissolved into the mist of waters. He was more familiar with, more confident of it, after all. It had come back to be unquestioningly dependent on him; and that was likest the real Jason, flesh of his flesh.

"Who are you, darling?" said Tryphena.

"I am Jason," answered the child.

She wept and fondled him rapturously. "And who am I?" she asked. "If you are Jason, you must know what to call me."

"I know," he said; "but I mustn't, unless you ask me."

"I won't," she answered, with a burst of weeping. "It is Christmas-day, dearest, when the miracle of a little child was wrought. I will ask you nothing but to stay and bless our desolate home."

He nodded, laughing. "I will stay, until you ask me."

They found some little old robes of the baby Jason, put away in lavender, and dressed him in them. All day he laughed and prattled; yet it was strange that, talk as he might, he never once referred to matters familiar to the childhood of the lost sailor.

In the early afternoon he asked to be taken out—seawards, that was his wish. Tryphena clothed him warmly, and, taking his little hand, led him away. They left the old man sleeping peacefully. He was never to wake again.

As they crossed the narrow causeway, snow, thick and silent, began to fall. Tryphena was not afraid, for herself or the child. A rapture upheld her, a sense of some compelling happiness, which she knew must before long take shape on her lips.

They reached the seaward dunes—mere ghosts of foothold in that smoke of flakes. The lap of vast waters seemed all around them, hollow and mysterious. The sound flooded Tryphena's ears, drowning her senses. She cried out, and stopped.

"Before they go," she screamed—"before they go, tell me what you were to call me?"

The child sprang a little distance, and stood facing her. Already his lower limbs seemed dissolving in the mists.

"I was to call you 'mother!'" he cried, with a smile and toss of his hand.

Even as he spoke, his pretty features wavered and vanished. The snow broke into him, or he became part with it. Where he had been, a gleam of iridescent dust seemed to show one moment before it sank and was extinguished in the falling cloud. Then there was only the snow, heaping an eternal chaos with nothingness.

Tryphena made this confession, on a Christmas-eve night, to one who was a believer in dreams. The next morning she was seen to cross the causeway, and thereafter was never seen again. But she left the sweetest memory behind her, for human charity, and an elf-like gift of loveliness.

WINTER MUSIC.

BY ROSAMUND MARRIOTT WATSON.

ALL through the oak-wood
Rooks fly and call;
Fast down the rustling boughs
Brown acorns fall.

Swart on the sunset
Rooks float and cry;
Pale in the garden plot
Late roses die.

What though December dawn?
Robins will sing;
Over the rainy lawn
Starlings clap wing.

Starlings of speckled coat,
Whimsical song,
Where the old windfalls lie
Gossip and throng.

Wren on the apple-bough,
Sweet-voiced and shrill,
Clear your crescendos rise,
Trill upon trill.

Though spring be far away,
Fair summer lost,
Hail to the Minstrels who
Sing in the frost!

A PREHISTORIC SKETCH.

BY W. H. BRYCE-STACPOOLE.

ILLUSTRATED BY CARTON MOORE PARK.

"WHAT is that?" I asked,—"a story?"

"Perhaps," said the Professor, "but rather, strictly speaking, a piece of reconstruction. Will you listen to it?"

I

There had been a storm, and the waves on the league-long beach fell with the continuous thunder of a cataract. The beach, stretched between the shore ends of two lines of volcanic hills, lay palely reflecting from its surface of ooze and slime the rays of a sun that had long passed the zenith. Here and there, like a mirror flung on the surface of the mud flats, lay a large pool; and farther inland, beyond the reach of the tide, a few stunted shrubs showed grey-green like lichen against the darkness of the salt marshes; but besides these dwarfed and miserable bushes, there was not a trace of vegetation to be seen in the great valley, which stretched to where the mountains of the interior stood vast and melancholy as the Lunar Cordilleras.

Amidst the mountains, far inland, fifty miles or more from the uproarious surf, occurred a conformation long lost to the living world. Three volcanic cones, equally symmetrical, gigantic and sinister looking, cast their columns of smoke to the sky.

The great cones smoking in the far distance, the grim and iron-grey hills in the near, the salt marshes where nothing moved, the birdless sky, the sailless sea, completed a picture awful in grandeur but lamentable from its desolation—a desolation accentuated by the figure upon the beach.

The figure was that of a woman, naked and brown, with long flowing hair of the colour of the seaweed, a strip of which she held in her hand.

She was squarely built and powerful-looking, and the hair which hid her ears and the conformation of her skull was of an extraordinary coarseness, and sprang from low down on her forehead, little more than an inch from the beetling brows which shadowed her sepulchral eyes.

Could Dante have seen her face, it would have merited his attentive regard. The outward and visible symbol of a million years of strife, strife with wind and weather, with reptile and beast, it was less a face than a mask, mysterious as the mask of Memnon, expressionless of human emotion as the volcanic hills.

She stood on the prehistoric beach, one of the first of us, naked, nameless, and forgotten; a human figure barely escaped from that titanic struggle in the mud which philosophers complacently call The Beginning of Things, and which theologians as complacently ignore.

II.—SOMETHING ALIVE IN THE SLIME.

She had stooped to pick up the ribbon of seaweed, not for fancy's sake, but for

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food. She chewed it as she pursued her way along the beach, making for the eastern row of hills, and keeping some fifty yards from the boiling surf. As she went, she kept glancing from left to right, and ofttimes she stopped suddenly, facing round as if spoken to. One might have fancied from her movements that she was accompanied by a number of people, some on her right, some on her left, and some behind, all of whom were addressing her in turns. One might also have fancied her the victim of aberrations and illusions; but fancy could never have pictured the terrible perils that were the true causes of these head turnings, halts, and indecisive movements.

Of a sudden she flung herself sideways on the mud, and the surface before her for some fifty yards shook, shivered, and quaked as if with internal laughter. She dragged herself slowly backwards and stood erect. Then she pursued her way, making a long *détour* to skirt the bog that had so nearly engulfed her.

She was now near the volcanic rocks flung out by the hills like an offering to the sea, and had passed a little creek that seemed innocent of all danger when, of a sudden, after a furtive glance across her shoulder, she sprang into the air as if galvanised by a powerful electric shock, and bounded madly forward.

Behind her the whole left bank of the creek was in motion; it rose, it heaved, it sank, it rose again, then . . . a head appeared, a head such as boys might make for fun out of a great lump of mud—the very eyes of the thing seemed of mud. . . .

She clung to the rocks and looked back. The creek was there but the Thing had vanished: nowhere on all the beach was there a sign of life, nor in all the country, from the seething surf to the three great cones smoking in the far distance.

III.—THE TEETH THAT TEAR.

She climbed amidst the rocks with the agility of an animal, making not directly upwards, but to the left diagonally and away from the sea.

At last she came to a space, a kind of cup-shaped hollow some forty feet in diameter, a tiny amphitheatre strewn with boulders.

Seated with his back to one of the boulders was a man. But for his skin he might have been mistaken for a skeleton. His hair was long, like the woman's, but it strayed across his face. He seemed, from his attitude, fast asleep, but his half-closed eyes were alert and watching the woman's every motion as she came towards him.

Death had set his seal upon this Prehistoric man. He was dying, not from age or injury or disease—he was dying as many a lion has died, as millions of men have died in The Beginning of Things: he was dying of slow starvation, because he had lost his teeth.

The woman glanced round as if she missed something, then she came hurriedly to the man and began to speak, if the sound which issued from her mouth, like the chattering of an ape in a rage, could be called speech.

She made movements with her hands outspread, and it was evident that she was demanding something. But the man made no reply. He seemed frightened and abashed, glancing around as if seeking for some place to hide himself; then he closed his eyes and collapsed, chin upon breast, and hands upon ground with palms turned outwards.

The woman turned contemptuously from him, and glanced round keenly, seeming to scent the air from the four points. Threading her way rapidly among the boulders, she began to search for something which she had left with the man, and which was no longer with him.

Behind a large boulder she suddenly came upon what she sought. It was a child, very small, about two years of age, quite dead, yet still warm. Its throat was torn. It had been killed by some savage animal. For a moment she stared at the mangled little corpse; then knelt down beside it and turned it about as if to examine it. She neither cried out nor showed any visible emotion.

The man with his back to the boulder had raised his lids, and was gazing at her and the body of the child with the gaze of a dreamer scarce awakened, and still confusing the scenery of sleep with the scenery of life.

IV.—A SHAPE AMIDST THE ROCKS.

All at once the woman rose from her position beside the child, and began to search again. Her face was changed. Her

lips protruded, her eyebrows formed one black band, her nostrils were distended.

She ran hastily hither and thither, with shoulders hunched and head low down, examining the ground carefully. Of a sudden she stopped, with both palms to her breast; peered narrowly at something in the grey soil, and drew a deep, hissing breath. Then she began to climb, bounding from rock to rock. She was following the trail of something, and following as a sleuth hound follows, by the scent.

Taking a zigzag course, she climbed, ascending higher and higher, till she reached the hill-top. From there lay an uninterrupted view of the coast line, wild and marvellous and tormented by the sea. Around stretched the country dominated by the three great cones whose clouds of smoke were purpled by the rays of the setting sun.

Amidst the boulders strewing the ground the woman pursued her way, straight as a hound on a hot trail towards the thing she sought.

It was lurking amidst the rocks—a thing more terrible than ever figured in the dreams of a madman. It had wings, yet it was not a bird; it had the body of a lizard, yet it was not a lizard; it had a head enormous and out of all proportion to its size—coffin-shaped, erect, swung back and balanced on a neck scrawny and covered with scales. Its eyes were immense, wide open, passionless, and cold as the eyes of an ophidian.

The mouth, which swung open and

"Against this thing the woman advanced to do battle."

closed rhythmically as if worked by a spring, showed sharp and cruel teeth, the wings sprang from claws as cruel as the teeth, and the whole monstrous figure, taking it on the scale of the bird's, was half as large again as the largest eagle.

That the beast knew an avenger had come was evident from its attitude and movements. It swung from side to side as it stood, perhaps the last of its species, a monstrous specimen of that most monstrous of creatures to which Goldfuss has given the name *Pterodactylus crassirostris*. It would have flown but for one wing which was damaged, perhaps in the struggle with the child it had killed.

Against this thing the woman advanced to do battle, armed only with her two horny hands and the hate that impelled her . . .

"That's all," said the Professor, and he folded his manuscript and wiped his glasses. "I wrote it the other night. What do you think of it as a story—eh?"

"Too incomplete," I replied. "Unless you tell what became of the Pterodactyl?"

"The Pterodactyl," he answered, evasively, "vanished from the earth ages ago."

"I did not refer to the race—I meant the individual. Well, what became of the woman?"

"The woman?" he answered in a puzzled way, knitting his brows as if he were trying to invent an ending for his story. Then his eye fell upon his wife, who was seated at the other end of the room by the fire, holding her two-year-old child to her breast and reading Pascal's "Pensées" by the flickering light. "The woman?" he answered, with a smile, "oh—the woman is still alive."

SHALL I NOT WAKE?

BY BERTHA DEANE FREEMAN

THO' water-lilies drift
Upon the lake,
Where purple shadows lift,
I shall not wake

Tho' West wind, in the reeds,
Their slumber break,
And Dawn with Darkness pleads,
I shall not wake

But if *you* chance to come,
For Love's dear sake,
And weep to find me dumb,
Shall I not wake?

THE HUMOURS OF THE IRISH GHOST.

BY SEUMAS MacMANUS.

THE Irish ghost, though he is always a strange, and often a startling, study, is likewise often a fellow with the elements of humour in him.

Such a fellow was the Ballinamona ghost, which appeared about four years ago. It came into the house of the Widow Griffin late at night, when that poor woman was at her prayers. She was a pious, good-hearted, simple-natured woman, was the Widow Griffin. She had lost her husband, Patrick, in late September, and it was just five weeks after, on All Saints' night, that the ghost came in. It drew forward, and, unasked, sat down to the fire. It did not speak. The Widow Griffin knew that a ghost dare not speak until it is spoken to. After a few minutes she gathered enough courage to ask it in the Name where it came from, and what was a-bother to it. It replied that it had come from Heaven, upon some little earthly errands.

"Did you see my Patrick there?" she asked eagerly.

"I did indeed," said the ghost.

"Thank God!" said the Widow Griffin.

"But," the ghost said, "he's badly off for the new overcoat Charlie Vicky made him, now the winter's comin' on."

"Poor fella! he is," said the widow. "Could I trouble you to take it to him?"

"No trouble in the wide wurrl', ma'am. Besides, he bid me tell you that you let him away without any money; and that them that hasn't a few ha'pence jinglin' in their pockets isn't thought much of up there, no more than down here."

"Sure, I might have known that," said the widow, "and I believe I have some silver in the house."

"Goold," said the ghost. "It's only goold that counts in Heaven."

The Widow Griffin sent the ghost upon its way with an overcoat (on its back, for convenience of carrying) and some gold pieces. And she felt a happier woman after.

And when, a twelvemonth later, at the Hallowday fair of Ardara, to her extreme surprise, she saw the overcoat on Barney Brogan of Carker, and questioned him where he got it, Barney, taken aback for one moment only, said:

"Ma'am, there's the greatest mysthery in the wurrl' about this coat. There was a night twelve months ago, I was comin' over the hill from Ailsie Haghie's, and there was a 'whish! like a covey of parthridges goin' over me head. I looked up to see what it was. I could only see some big object disappearin' like a sthreak, and a black thing, that it seemed to have dhmpped in its coorse, come saffin' down, and fell at me feet. And when I picked it up, what was it but a brave overcoat! Did ever ye hear tell of a sthranger thing, Mrs. Griffin, in all your born days?"

She did not.

And I remember the time old John Dunnigan, who was short-sighted, and whose fear of ghosts was such that he would never go abroad after night without carrying a prayer-book in each of his side pockets and one in each hand—I say, I remember the time he stopped before the Lig *bouchaleen bwee* (hen-weed) that was waving in the wind on Drimenny Hill, and asked it in God's name to know what was a-bother to it, or had it anything on its mind; and if it had, he conjured it to make it known to him at once—to relieve itself of its burden, and go back to where it came from.

Some of the good boys were coming back over Drimenny Hill at the time, from Mary Hilly's Convoy in Tullylagan, and they were just in time to see John stop and question the *bouchaleen bwee*. They burst with laughter too soon, so that John discovered his mistake quicker than he would have done.

Still, when we of the rest of the country heard it, we had mirth for twelve months.

Oweny Cumeen of Altnacapal was another man who had a mortal terror of ghosts, which never forsook him till the day he died. And he imparted to his own children the like terror of unearthly visitors. On a night Oweny, with his little son who was named after him, went home from town. Oweny seldom allowed night to fall on him in town; but on the rare occasions on which it took him unawares, he usually would not then leave for home

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until he had got company. On this unfortunate night he had no more inspiriting company than his young heir. Oweny had bought a half-hundred of meal, which he put into a creel and carried on his back. When he travelled alone at night, he was in the habit of casting glances over his shoulder at intervals. But when he had one of his family with him he spared his own courage, at the expense of theirs.

"Oweny, darlin'," he said to his son now, as they jogged out of the town, "Oweny, darlin', you watch well behind you."

"I will, daddy," little Oweny replied. And he observed his duty.

Half a mile out of the town, little Oweny gave a suppressed cry of alarm.

"What is it, Oweny, boy?" said his father.

"Somethin' white comin' afther ye, daddy."

"Come on, sonny," the father whispered, increasing his pace to a trot. "Look behind, Oweny, *avic*," he said after a while, "and see if it's there."

"Daddy, it's right at your heels still. And it's babbin' (bobbing)."

"Come faster, Oweny."

And they went faster.

"Look behind again, Oweny *ahaisge*."

"It's there, daddy, and it's babbin' worse than ever."

Very soon both Owenys were galloping. The younger at regular intervals took his usual half-glance over his shoulder, and invariably reported, "It's babbin' away, daddy."

When, at last, both of them, breathless, burst into their home, Oweny found himself carrying an empty bag.

Through a hole in the creel, the mouth of the bag had got out, very soon after they left the town. The string got unloosed, and the contents were being sown to the winds as they went. And, the faster Oweny went, the farther flew out the white and "babbin'" bag!

Perhaps the Cmnaraidh ghost was the most wonderful in our country. It is now eighteen years since he flourished. Father Pat O'Gara was the parish priest there, then. Conal Carney had died an old bachelor, and left his house, place, stock, and cash, to his orphan niece, Una—to the great gratification of every one in the parish. At least, of every one except the McGahrens, his cousins, who were bitter because he did not remember them in his will.

But poor Una got little good of house or place for twelve months after. For Conal's ghost came back to visit it. Several of Una's friends, disbelieving, came to sleep in the house; but they always fled in the middle of the night, unconventionally clad, over the hill to the nearest house—Rodgie Mulhern's.

Every one pitied poor Una. And every one said the ghost should be questioned to find what was on his mind; for all agreed that there was something serious a-trouble to poor Conal, God rest him! But though every one was ready enough with advice, there was no volunteer who would give it practical effect.

At length they said, why not send for Father Pat O'Gara, and let him come and question the ghost, and read him back to where he came from? So Una's friends went to Father Pat, at length, with the whole story, and asked him to come and lay the ghost.

"I'll come," Father Pat said, "and"—decisively—"I'll lay him, moreover."

"And don't forget to fetch your book, Father Pat," they called back, as they were leaving him.

But, notwithstanding, when Father Pat came, he had *not* his book.

"Did ye not fetch your book, father?" they queried.

"I did better," said Father Pat: "I fetched my whip," and he cracked it.

They said nothing, but they shook their heads.

Father Pat insisted upon sitting up alone, that night, in the haunted house. And he asked to have a bottle of the best whisky, and a glass, left with him. As Father Pat was a most abstemious man, and a man dead against drink, they all wondered at this again. But they said nothing,—only shook their heads.

On the table by his side the priest laid the bottle, and the glass half-filled. When he heard, after midnight, the noise of a window being raised, he conveniently fell asleep, and, contrary to his usual custom, snored slightly. He had his whip by him. And he was a powerful man, remember, was this Father Pat.

The ghost glided up the floor, and looked intently at the priest. After watching him for a couple of minutes, he reached out his hand, took up the glass, smelt it, and then raised it to his lips.

I said Father Pat was asleep, but yet he was not so dead asleep but that he

Continued on Supplement, page 4.

noticed every move of the ghost. And just when the latter had got the glass to its lips Father Pat suddenly arose, whip in hand. The glass as suddenly dropped from the ghost's hand, and was smashed in smithereens on the floor. And the ghost, strange to relate, was the frightened one.

Father Pat said, "I'm informed you've been wandering on this earth more than is good for ye; so I have come here to lay ye—by laying on ye!"

Whereupon, he started in. I remarked that this Father Pat was a powerful man. So powerful, indeed, that he made that ghost hop like a hedgesparrow and yell like a wild cat. The ghost danced and yelled all over the room; and Father Pat thwacked and thonged him for all he was able. And, the first chance he got, the ghost bolted from the room door, and then through the kitchen window, and outran any thing ever before known in the annals of ghostland.

It was laid, sure enough. Poor Una from that day got the good of her house and land. Her Uncle Conal's ghost had evidently had its trouble relieved, for it never more came back to bother her.

But Father Pat O'Gara remarked, as a coincidence, that immediately upon the laying of the ghost one of the McGahrens had taken to his bed—ill with the small-pox—the Lord save us all! And indeed he was not better of the small pox, and did not show out, for six weeks.

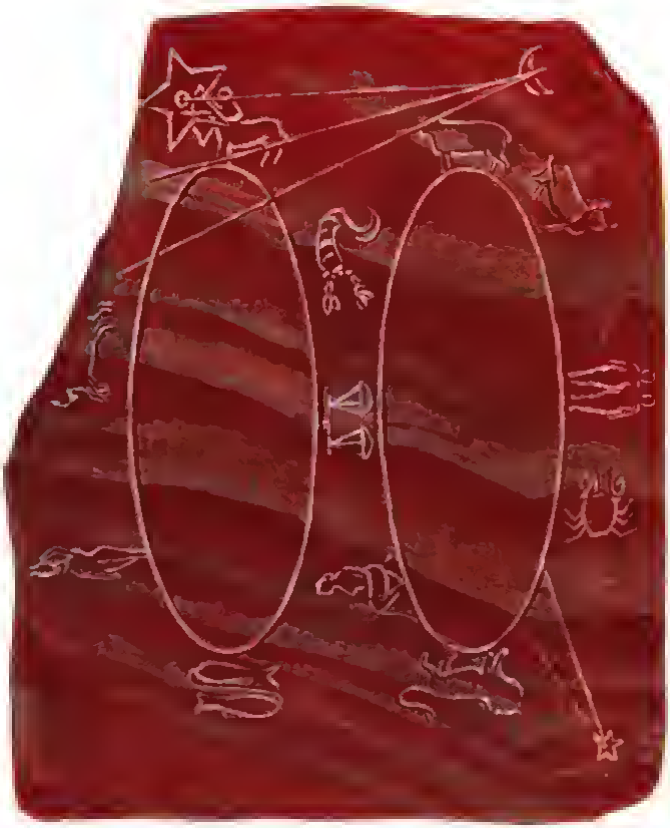
That ghosts have their serious side I'm not the man to deny. But there's a silver lining to every cloud—if only we look for it.

REHEARSING FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

(*Drawing by* HILDA COWHAM)

I HAVE a nephew aged ten,
Who never goes to bed
Without unloading there and then
The thoughts that fill his head,

"What's better than the holidays?"
He asks the other night.
"School," I rejoinec. "Oh no," he says;
"It's just a pillow fight."



THE GOLDEN MIST STONE

PALL MALL MAGAZINE

VOL. XXXVIII. JULY 1906. NO. 159.

THE LAST OF THE TENTH LEGION.

IT was to his Villa Sirena, at Sorrento, amid its interbraiding shine and dark, that Vaini summoned me, in May 1895, for a psychical experiment as to

"She was clad in a seamless pink tunic that fell to the knees, draping the figure It revealed—a figure beautiful as that of Diana whom the Ephesians loved"

which he wrote, "The door of classic life will be wide open before us." I had spent a few weeks in Naples aiding him in unrolling a dozen Herculanean manuscripts, and was thus within easy reach. Our correspondence during the

preceding twelve months had enabled me to follow those tendencies which continually drew him to realms of speculative thought. I knew with what delight he mused upon the imagery of bygone times, and perceived that within his mind had kindled an ambition to discover the mystical links and mainsprings between modern and ancient days. During the earlier years he had caught some of the finer phantasies and made them real, and he was now ardent to stand within some reanimated precinct of the antique world. He seemed drawn to what proved the most living of all our experiments by a force akin to the magnetic attraction of great gems: and now, in tracing this summary of an afternoon spent beyond that "wide open door," I realise afresh that there are experiences which give meaning to all the rest of life, and in reviewing this fugitive recital I note with satisfaction that it bears the impress of Truth,—that everlasting hall-mark which is not to be effaced.

I found the Professor in his orange grove pruning and watering his favourite trees. His brown eyes were soft with dreaming, and, as though putting the last accent to some train of far-borne meditation, he greeted me with the words, "The result rests on the knees of the gods." I took in the familiar scene at a glance—the Villa overhanging the sapphire sea, the Monastery green-curtained amid its myrtles, Vesuvius ten miles distant across the sparkling brilliance of the Bay of Naples. About us spread a delightful privacy of shade that lured the fancy, and over all rested that peace of Nature which is as divine as the wise silence of Olympus. I delighted in its over wood of orange boughs, its undergrowth of jasmine and oleander, and beneath these a fine texture of mosses and wild strawberry leaves and violets. Chiefly my gaze rested upon a tall lady lilac bush, a luminous pink shrub, whereon the Italian sunshine streamed its witchery of opalescent hues. I doubt not the juices of that tree are the love-blood whereof poets write. In the warm stillness its branches bent in the light breeze and thrilled the air with meaning. I thought it splendid as a beautiful woman, and was absorbed in the jewelled spray of fancies it suggested when Vaini cut short my reverie.

"Here," said he, laying his hand upon my shoulder, and pointing to the lustrous foliage, "here is the place of my soul."

Our vegetarian luncheon finished, he explained the fine spun theory round which his studies hovered. In removing a foundation wall of Roman origin, his workmen had brought to light a thin section of crimson onyx, richly veined, which he had recognised to be a Golden Mist Stone. On each side was drawn an ellipse, about which were grouped signs of the Zodiac and points that evidently marked the position of astronomical bodies.

"Dear Master," I interrupted, after a summary inspection of this object, "what is a Golden Mist Stone?"

"I am vexed," he answered, with pained surprise, "to hear you ask elementary questions, after all the years I have led you through hidden ways towards the unfamiliar side of things. We have to do with the electric force of that Golden Mist commonly called the Nebular hypothesis, and this stone is a tangible expression of that crown of roseate light we see forming and fading. Upon it has been traced a planetary conjunction which is its key through ages back and centuries to come. For several months I have been absorbed in the astounding properties of this fragment. I will not pause to explain their application at this moment, since their trial must be made to-morrow. My colleague in Berlin fixes the original date as A.D. 294, which was in the reign of Diocletian. This identical conjunction is present now for the first time since August 1793, and will not occur again for a hundred and twenty-eight years. I have made the necessary

preparation, and after its black crystal bath the stone is to be held in the light to-morrow precisely at noon."

"I divine your thought," I observed: "that herein exists some soul wrought chain between ourselves and remote periods."

"You have read rightly," answered Vaini, with a kindling glance. "In this petrifaction I detect truths startling in their novelty and power, yet definite and certain as that beneath the chill of frozen winter hide the promise and buds of spring. I have often shown you that intellectual landmarks are sometimes most useful when they point to disillusions: now, at last, in the evening of my days, it is mine to fix the theory of mystical perspective."

"You really believe that under these conditions it will be possible to behold . . ."

"Nay, I have already beheld that which made me catch my breath The bones of the old world sometimes lie very near the surface. It was three days ago, a trifle too soon astronomically, and I had not properly charged the black crystal bath Nevertheless I touched the fringe of that we are in search of To my joy, the outline of this villa faded, and in its place appeared a semblance of some wholly different building. I even saw a falcon-faced fellow, who gazed at me with affright."

"Was he a Roman?" I interrupted.

"Here is a trace of him," the Maestro answered. "A dust portrait, fixed upon the Mist Stone itself by the method you and I have practised together."

Taking the onyx from my tutor's hand, I peered intently into its depth, till a figure emerged from a blurred background. It was an undersized, swarthy old man, habited in short-sleeved tunic, standing with a hand upon either hip and laughing noiselessly to himself. I could see his aged and minutely wrinkled face and the yellow gleam in his hard black eyes At a glance I knew that rock-hewn facial type to be Roman His left shoulder was slightly depressed, as though by a lifelong burden. Suddenly he discovered me, and in terror his jaws began working silently with feverish haste. I remember thinking that he had thus become a doleful caricature of all humanity's sorrow. Then, swiftly and unaccountably as the image had come, it vanished.

"Place yourself twenty years back," Vaini exclaimed, with the masterful emphasis I knew so well, "in any dramatic scene whereof you retain a clear impression Close your eyes and picture intently what happened: the semblance of that day will still be vivid—you will behold its imagery and incidents, and the people who came and went will appear as real as you and I are now. So will it be if this talisman disclose its secret. I will not waste time reminding you of the reality of the unseen, for it is as evident as is the evanescence of all reality. It is beyond me to anticipate the precise forces which may rest within this fragment, but we are likely to find them as living as the volition which turns a climbing vine aside from the smooth wall to the nails whereon it fastens its tendrils. We should behold the panorama it bears and listen to words spoken centuries ago. We may learn how it was first charged with supernatural force, for its use is as ancient as the magic ivories."

My acquaintance with Vaini, whom I remember, now that he is no more, as the most fascinating and baffling of men, had familiarised me with that tonic of emotion, which he justly declared to be an incomparable stimulant. His projects were never wanting in proportion and continuity One of his most admirable demonstrations had been made that winter, wherein, roving at random through the animal world, he established by inference from actual experiment that animals astray upon their humble path of life consult instinctively with one another and

receive a friend's advice In the essay to which he had summoned me, he probably felt too sure of himself to doubt his pupil But it was in the full consciousness of my own imperfect capacity to supplement his pursuit of intellectual wild flowers that I answered, "Professor, will you tell me exactly my share in this adventure?"

Vaini's manner always took on a heightened charm in presence of danger An artist at close quarters with a technical and critical problem is intensely human. His voice now sank to that confidential whisper Italians cherish, as he glanced about to assure himself no eavesdroppers lurked. "Carissimo," he answered, "you will keep your hand not on the pulse but on the heart. We may find ourselves confronted by a peril so extraordinary that it will be unique in the history of mankind. We are about to tread the dust of Roman days. What shall we find there, if not men and women as living as ourselves? Who can say that to them it may not be we that shall seem visionary—that to us they may not prove a fateful reality!"

"How," I asked, "when we have entered upon that bygone age, are we to return to the Nineteenth Century?"

"If dipped in fresh water," replied Vaini, "the negative effect of the stone should come into being. The world of Diocletian will fade, and we shall again be standing in this garden But, mark you, there is a dreadful possibility."

"Which is," I murmured as my companion paused, watching me intently, "that the Mist Stone may be taken from us."

"Precisely If the worst happens, and we are imperilled, we must instantly join hands, and I will cast the talisman into the nearest water."

On the following day the clock marked twelve as, after a morning spent in preparation, we began our experiment. For the first time in my lifelong acquaintance with Vaini be betrayed great nervous excitement, and the hand that held the uplifted onyx trembled in the sunlight. Before us the Bay of Naples seemed a pavement of lazuli flecked with whitecaps and seamed with glistening aquamarine. I gazed an instant upon that shadow-haunted floor, whereon the sunshine and the breeze traced a silhouette that looked like Love's bent bow. I beheld the foam of waves breaking into lace along the shore. Beneath us, where the sapphire paled to emerald, an Italian felucca lay anchored. Suddenly I observed that its half-furled sails were changing to garnet red, and at the same instant I felt a phosphorescent glow rising about me, and perceived a smell like burning sandal-wood. The faintness of an overpowering emotion obscured my senses, and I heard no more the whisper of the sea. Before me appeared a Pompeian portico, pearl white and crimson like a seashell's lining. Vaini's orange grove melted into tamarind and oleander Amid the trees stood two marble statues, slightly tinted—Aphrodite, singer of songs, and Pallas the torch bearer. It was no more the half light of illusion. . . . Vaini and I had crossed the impalpable dividing line, and moved backward seventeen centuries

I was looking at a vixen chained to a column, with a litter of cubs running loose about her, all of them making efforts to reach a scarlet-headed, green backed woodpecker that hung in a cage, when my attention was diverted to the little old man whose dust portrait my tutor had taken. He wore the same short tunic, about his neck was a metal collar, and I noticed that his right ear had been bitten away. He did not at first perceive us, and fancying himself alone with a great hound that stood gazing good-naturedly at the young foxes, raised a wineskin, and refreshed himself with a gurgling draught. Suddenly

he beheld us, and tying the neck of his pigskin bottle, stared at Vaini with frightened eyes, and said in Latin, "Good luck to you. *Salutem!* May you sneeze pleasantly!"

I have spoken of the lady lilac bush which to this day stands at the angle of the Villa, and whose pink foliage was now the last to fade. Its flesh tint,

"She was playing ball, tossing it over her shoulder, and in the runs and turns of that leisurely movement kept time with the music, dancing a measure that might have been spun in the wildwood."

suddenly catching a richer colour, melted into the figure of a young woman, as though the tree were transforming itself to human form. Her face was fine and resolute, and at the instant—not quite revealed, nor yet all hidden—she seemed the poem one never forgets.

She was clad in a seamless pink tunic that fell to the knees, draping the figure it revealed—a figure beautiful as that of Diana whom the Ephesians loved.

Her hair was fastened at the back with a tiny arrow, and I remember smiling at my thought that its rose-flushed golden splendour is called in France *soleil couchant*. From within the building came the sound of a double-octaved harp, such as the Egyptians knew, played very slowly; and as she listened to its vibrant notes, her statuesque arms were carelessly touching the soundless strings of an imaginary instrument. The music was a lyric of dreams,—of the mating of those phantom shapes wherewith the ancients peopled their world, of flowers, and the secret of dawn, and the murmur of awakening woods.

Then with a cry of surprise she beheld us, and ejaculating words I distinguished imperfectly, came forward with eyes fixed upon the onyx Vaini held.

II

Her voice brought two men from the interior of the building, who halted at sight of us. One was a lean, elderly individual, pausing with grey head tilted eagerly forward. His mouth was bent awry and twitching, revealing three or four broad yellow front teeth; and as he stood moistening his lips, it was easy to see that in his bewilderment he knew not to which of the gods to offer himself. The other was a young man of effeminate appearance. His handsome face was insignificant, clean shaven but for a small moustache, and his cheeks were slightly rouged. It was a face which, although immature, was grooved with lines that told of furious living. About him hovered a fragrance of cosmetics and spiced wine.

The girl turned towards us with a smothered titter, crying in Latin, "Come, father, look upon them; there is no danger. Decius, come. I wonder what language they speak—what nation wears such ugly garments! Januarius, do not stand gaping, but bring a skin of wine; the younger barbarian looks pale: see, father, it is our Mist Stone they have found and brought back."

I observed the girl attentively, and listened to the name *Puteolana*, by which the men addressed her, and which could have reference only to her birthplace, Puteoli. She moved with athletic grace, as unembarrassed in her light attire as a faun would have been in his. I gazed upon the shell-heart pink of her skin, the straight eyebrows almost meeting, the rose-leaf lips curving in laughter, and read in her face the languorous poetry of an indolent life. At her summons her companions advanced, and the elder, speaking with droll earnestness, said to us:

"My name is Appian; this is my daughter Cythera; my vocation is to cast a thread from the familiar to the unknown. Am I not an Augur? *Salve!* I wish you joy. To speak with a welcome guest is better than broaching a wine-cask. It is distinctly before me that something is about to happen—that it is brought about by our recovered talisman—that to us, as to you, this day will almost seem real."

I listened to these phrases, spoken in the purest Latin, with a consciousness that by the strangest crook of my tutor's craft he and I had been translated to that visionary land of fine light and subtle dusk we call classical. I caught the meaning of what was said with tolerable readiness, albeit my verbs had grown rusty since the gerund-grinding days of thirty years before. In the conversation that followed I was occasionally forced to use Italian, now and then a phrase of Greek; more than once I was wholly at a loss.

He who announced himself an Augur, lifting his eyes in a careless sweep of the heavens, now clapped his hands for dinner, as was doubtless his noonday habit. The hunchback Januarius, who had been standing watchful and doglike in the shadow—a shadow that seemed to me the gathered dark of ages—adjusted

a curtain drawn half way down the atrium as we entered. At that moment Vaini thoughtlessly produced a silk pocket-handkerchief and blew his nose, an action that excited the wonder and amusement of the Romans, as did the novelty of our pockets. While his hands were occupied I seized the opportunity to relieve him of the magical onyx, thinking I might presently have grievous need of it.

Before us was an encrusted table spread with a silver service. Near it were sculptured lounges heaped with cushions. I noticed the goldfish in the impluvium, the hanging fourfold candelabra, the crystal flagons and glazed amphoræ. Against the wall stood a diminutive altar whereon reddened a flame of burning apple-wood. The master of the house sprinkled it with wine, the Roman world even in its decadence preserving the ancient veneration of its ancestors.

"You might think those kindling twigs," murmured Decius, carelessly cracking a nut, "yet, if you look closer, they are only uncertain certainties, grown quite brittle now, and half a dozen promises that failed,—look with what iridescent blues and greens they burn!"

Two girls, waiting to serve us, stood motionless against the triclinium wall. At the sight I realised, as never before, that life, however filled with the glory of nature, seeks its finest inspiration in the form of woman. Near by was the Egyptian harp which one of them was touching as the lilac tree faded. Decius seated himself, and in reply to my inquiry informed me that what I had heard was a hymn to Dionysos, adding, with an irreverent laugh, that within it was hidden some such phrase as the Immortals wove treading the winepress.

"They are Spartan slaves," he added, with a scrutinising glance at the maidens; "full blooded animals of many moods, fervent and flushed after their meat soup—looking their best when reposing on the grass, a drowsy heap of muscular pink flesh." These words reached the ears of one of them, for she turned aside with tremulous lips. At this token of weakness Decius laughed aloud. "A beautiful woman's anguish is a morsel for the gods," he whispered, dipping his finger-tips in a bowl half filled with some spiced liquid set apart for his own use. The rest of us moistened our hands in beryl water while the wine was poured. No two cups were alike, Vaini's being a silver goblet, Cythera's a crystal chalice, and mine a deep saucer of mother-of-pearl. Excitement had made me so thirsty that I emptied it at a draught.

After boiled eggs and the roe of a lamprey, a ramshead pasty was set before us, which Decius, with a sarcastic nod towards our host, called Shepherd's pie. This name in connection with Appian afforded him much amusement, and seeing me puzzled, he added, "If we told one another the truth, who would not wish to die!"

"My cook is Sicilian," remarked Appian, splitting an egg. "Let me recommend that chicken—it is tender as a lover's glance. If," said he, turning to Vaini, "you wish to buy a villa, I will sell you this for a paltry four hundred thousand sesterces, and you may take the Spartan girls and my cook at cost. You could find no better point from which to observe the fire shot line of yonder smoky mountain. And yet," he added, with a twinkle of the eye, "I cannot rid myself of the thought that all we now behold is a mutual hallucination. Am not I a reader of dreams?"

The repast ended with a dish of truffles stewed in cider, followed by cheese-cakes and African honey. With muttered ejaculations to the gods, Appian laid a rose upon the altar, saying, "Nor that I am old, what is left me save the mild rose of my youth? Ahime! how quick doth the cut laurel fade!"

Decius watched him with a contemptuous smile, and turning to me murmured, "How must Cupid laugh as he wings his arrows, till like Appian he groans to find them broken!"

"Or rather," retorted Appian, turning angrily upon him, "how often Cupid never wakes till Psyche kisses him good-bye! Young lovers, now-a-days, are not what they were."

We returned to the atrium, whence beyond the lustre of the pines I gazed seaward, and beheld with emotion the surf and sunshine of a bygone age. It was more wonderful to look upon than a newly discovered star. I ventured to ask Putcolana if I might see the peristyle I doubted not extended beyond the triclinium; and when we reached its portal I halted, arrested by the most marvellous sight it has ever been my fortune to behold. Before me opened an enclosure filled with flaming red and yellow poppies. Beneath the tasselled knitting of vines were frescoes rich as the colour of words. On a border of turf sat one of the Spartan girls, breathing into a flute such piping as the vesper sparrow's song—a broken note of things once beautiful. She seemed the heart of Greece brooding remembered melody. The other paced to and fro lightfoot as the nymph that vanished before her pursuer. She was playing ball, tossing it over her shoulder, and in the runs and turns of that leisurely movement kept time with the music, dancing a measure that might have been spun in the wildwood. Beside her on the greensward glided her shadow—and to this day I hear the faint reverberance of their sandalled feet. Suddenly she paused at a fountain wherein the water trickled, and drank from her curving hands.

Cythera grew impatient at my delay before what to her was commonplace. Her attitude was that of one who waits a signal, and it flashed upon me that she had waited thus for ages.

"You have come at last," she ejaculated, "after keeping me watching . . . how long! . . . . . knowing all the while that some day some one would find our Mist Stone, and that Mercury would whisper in his ear. You might have guessed, even though you could not count the years."

"How was it lost?" I asked.

"A year ago I was betrothed to Enceladus—you have heard the name of the Centurion who slew the Imperator Carus. Last summer he went with the Tenth Legion into a distant land. It was my father's wish that I should marry him, and I could only obtain that an oracle should speak."

The Greek girls were standing near, listening so intently that the animal nature which looked from their statuesque faces was quelled. Cythera motioned me to the end of the garden, and added, with a laugh at which the crimson woodpecker lifted its wings and turned its head askance, "Our answer, written in characters you might have mistaken for mine, declared I should be his who came with the Mist Stone in his hand. Appian was so angered that he flung it into yonder well."

"And Enceladus?"

"The Tenth Legion has been overwhelmed and destroyed. Enceladus was a brave man; many months' silence followed; no doubt he perished. I shall never again hear that funeral march he loved. But we waste words. Such an opportunity comes not twice,—let us away!"

"It seems," I answered, scarce able to repress a smile at my predicament, "that it is I who have fulfilled the oracle. And now—away whither?"

"Whither you will, so it be far from Decius."

"What then to you," I ventured to ask, "is Decius?"

"Alas! I am to marry him. Oh, you who have the talisman, the latchkey to every soul, show me a way of escape."

"Twice betrothed," I exclaimed, "and both times unwillingly!"

"It was but natural," replied the girl, "that Decius should take the place of Enceladus,—is he not his son? Yet rotten grain makes poor bread. As for the other, who cares now the manner of man he was! I shall never again come, tame to his whistle. "I hate soldiers and fighting men and their heavy-handed ways."

I stood before Cythera, listening to the crickets trilling in the grass. I divined in her the Roman nature, tender, passionate and sensuous. Her hand was upon mine, and a beautiful woman's touch is always a caress. Some such careless pressure often draws a man and woman instinctively to one another, and conscious at that moment of the link of a masterful attraction, I remembered the "curious knot" which Circe taught Odysseus. It was a hand firm and strong to send the discus whirling. I looked upon her hair, turned ruddy in the sun-blaze, and beneath that sleeveless tunic divined the contour of a splendid body. I gazed into the flame of those intense eyes—and that instant's swift remembrance of my duty to Vaini remains to this day the splinter of an arrow in my heart.

We were standing at the cliff side; and pointing to the Italian felucca, which in keeping with the rest had changed to a Roman galley, she added: "Yonder is the ship we call *To-Day*. It must presently pass the horizon and be in sight of coasts beyond the Herculanean pillars. Let us hasten to those dream-fields beyond the sunburnt West and be happy. We will turn upon Fate as Diana turned upon Actæon. Be not ungrateful. Is it so stern a lot for a stranger, lost in the unknown, to find one like me awaiting? Come, I will give you a fine white tunic, one of my own, and we will cast these hideous garments into the sea."

She paused, and the deep-spoken word, the immortal word, trembled in the silence—a silence as hushed as the breathless instant that falls between prayers. With an effort I controlled my emotion, and answered, "The onyx is not mine, but another's, and how can I betray his trust!"

She moved away at this ungracious reply, and pointing to the cloud-shadows flitting over the sea, "The things we wish, yet do not wholly understand," she exclaimed, "are there written, fine as the Sibylline meaning of October leaves. Who does not divine behind them the phantoms that gaze on us and beckon ere they fly? At this moment all the birds in the world are singing, yet something whispers me that this meeting is only for an hour—that I no longer belong here . . . that I must go."

At the word Appian, followed by his slave Januarius, hurried into the peristyle. Their faces had blanched, and they were talking excitedly, the dwarf crying:

"I warned you, Master, it is a grievous sign when the flame grows cold."

"It was but yesterday," moaned the Augur, "I touched an egg in the nest of a brooding bird, and now,—what a fistful!"

Cythera needed not to be told what had happened. "It is Enceladus—the dead come back!"—she exclaimed with fine intuition, and in her quickened breath was the fever of hate. Pushing me into a cubiculum, she murmured cheerfully, "Be perfectly quiet,—no man need die before his time."

It was a tiny chamber, lighted by two panes of glass and half filled by a gilded bedstead. I seated myself near a dressing-table, whereon were spread a mirror of dark purple glass, some ointment pots, a dice box, and a wax tablet and stylus.

For some moments I had missed Vaini, and now, as the new-comer strode in

... exclaimed, "you will end by making me believe that ambition is the only aim — in the most desperate hour I cherished the thought of you—till now the sight of you chills me "

and tossed his cloth hat upon a table, I was stupified to behold in him my tutor transfigured to the semblance of a Roman. And yet it was not my Nineteenth-Century companion, but his prototype, the philosopher changed to an impressive embodiment of physical power, ruthless as a scythe.

He wore a corselet of embroidered silk over a tunic decorated with richly ornamented bands which reached to his knees. From his shoulders fell a mantle of gossamer texture, and his feet were shod with leather buskins whose soft lining served in lieu of socks. By a strap over his shoulder hung a short heavy sword like a hunter's blade, on whose hilt was modelled a tiny boar, the emblem of the Tenth Legion. His hair had become close cropped, his face suddenly bronzed, the mouth larger and thinner-lipped than Vaini's. Only the same soul of swiftness looked from those far-seeing eyes, and in them I read the indomitable will that through immortal centuries had chased many a golden-dusted King.

Cæsar's narrative of his conquest of Gaul is the finest exponent of force ever put upon paper. Between the lines of that recital of heroic science we perceive that when the tragic side was weighed the rest counted for nothing. What cared the Tenth Legion, wiping its crimsoned sword, for aught beyond its sanguinary autograph! The face of Enceladus said, as distinctly as a page of the Commentaries, that the more clean strokes are given the fewer will be received. Vaini a Centurion of the thunder-throated! Only to look upon him one knew that to yield to less than Fate was not in that forthright soul. It was indeed Vaini, but cast in an antique mould, with a new look of self-centred stoicism, for he had suddenly become a soldier, and a soldier lives near to the heart of great things.

I glanced between the curtains, and saw him speaking to Decius, his son, who drew back before him.

"Grown hair on thy lip," he sneered. "By Cerberus, thou shalt grow a tail as well. Thou art dumb as the desert. Augur," he cried, turning to Appian: "bid your cook serve me a slice of bacon in a mess of stale peas—I have come far and am hungry." Then, throwing himself on a cane lounge, he added: "Tell Cythera to come hither and sit by my side."

III.

The master of the house curtly dismissed Januarius to the kitchen. Bacon and stale peas were easily provided, but I smiled at the evasion which followed the summons of Cythera.

"Enceladus," cried the Augur, with demonstrative gladness, "you are thrice welcome. We have heard gruesome things . . . of the Legion surprised in the Pannonian forest, of a fighting line formed amid quicksands, of the encircling enemy. Months went by, we feared the worst, and in thinking of you my life's colour faded to ashen grey. How well I remember our last talk in this garden! I told you Puteolana was loath to leave her childhood's home, and offered to sell it you for five hundred thousand sesterces. Now, ere she comes, let us strike hands upon the bargain, and it shall be yours to greet your affianced with the word that yonder sea of sunshine, these sweet paths, this wistful green, remain hers."

The soldier listened with disdain. "You have an upreaching mind," he sardonically answered, "and so have I. The girl shall not come empty-handed; the Villa shall indeed be hers, as your gift, together with five hundred thousand sesterces. I should not have asked so rich a dower for her, but be that as you will. Thus much being agreed, give me truce to ambiguous grumblings, and tell me why it is I still await Cythera."

"She comes, Centurion; she but adorns herself, girls that go to meet the lover of their choice must needs paint the rose."

How keenly at that critical moment I remembered Vaini's anticipation, that albeit the incidents of our adventure might appear as mere remembered happenings, yet the shapes to be encountered were capable of proving dangerous in the extreme! I dared not look through the curtains of the cubiculum, but heard Cythera's sandalled feet, and divined the embarrassment of her meeting with Enceladus in the presence of his son. This was not lost upon her first betrothed, and he came to the point with characteristic directness.

"Girl!" he exclaimed, "you will end by making me believe that ambition is the only aim. Through a dozen misadventures mine has been the patience which has known how to wait. While I have made my slow-trod way hither something overhead beckoned on. Through the long retreat I mused upon love's unfoldings. In the most desperate hour I cherished the thought of you—till now the sight of you chills me."

An instant's silence followed, then the Centurion's chair was overturned and the pavement rang with his step.

I have mentioned that in my first sight of Appian's Villa a hound stood watching the gambols of some foxes. It now advanced to the door of the cubiculum and looked in at me through the half-drawn curtain. At this indication Enceladus sprang to his feet, crying: "To how many things dogs listen that are beyond reach of human ear!" Then the drapery was flung aside, and the Centurion of the Tenth stood regarding me with no friendly eye.

His likeness to Vaini was so absurd that I might have taken the figure for a martial transformation. Even the manner and gestures were so strikingly familiar, however seemingly grotesque, that I bit my lip to hide a smile.

"You laugh!" he ejaculated angrily. "You dare to laugh!"

His menace and the rhythm of those sonorous vowels clutched my heart. Here was Vaini about to strike with the very fate whereof he had warned me. With this astounding metamorphosis before me, it was useless to seek to make myself known, and I shuddered to think of the consequence of an incautious word. For a moment we stood observing one another, while the afternoon's lengthening shadow crept towards me with death lurking behind. It occurred to me with gruesome distinctness that had I wished to commit suicide I could not have advanced more accurately to my destruction.

"I find you alone," he exclaimed, "yet Appian says there is one with you. Where is that other?"

I longed to blurt the truth: "It's you, now so strangely travestied, I came with," but stifled the words and answered, "I fervently wish he stood in my place."

"Who is he?" asked the Roman, with Vaini's habit of clasping and unclasping his interlacing fingers, "and why wish him in your place? Speak up, man; your discourse lacks wings!"

"Because his is a spirit kindred with your own. His life has been spent unravelling tangled skeins, and like you he has dealt with forces and conquered them. He insists that the only thing worth living for is bringing the impossible to pass. He has high courage and a neck unbowed, for one who has spent a lifetime among the Immortals fears no man."

The threat faded from the face that was so startling, yet so familiar. "Faltering feet sometimes reach their goal," he answered, "and yours may not be far astray. Walk with me to the end of the garden, and tell me who and what you are."

"I am born of the school of Epicurus," I replied, "and with Horace I take my portion from the marrow of the day."

"What is your name?"

"As a boy they called me Wilham the Silent."

"You have been brought from some remote country and evidently from another age. Who can say what drift floats from one sphere to another! Does Rome still rule?"

"The things that made Rome great are still supreme."

"Yet I warrant it is still the same old empty-barrel world the Cæsars found it?"

"The stars continue to repeat their crystal prophecy; we still gather wild grapes in our neighbours' vineyard; the wood-nymphs beckon and the wines still run. There is no change save a frothing buzz and clank of wheels."

He stood listening attentively, plucking a flower asunder whilst gazing towards the diamond dust sunshine across the Bay, and smiling as from Surrentum's rocky bosom the bugle-call of a marching cohort smote the air with triumph. Perhaps that sweet exultant summons seemed to him an omen of good. Superstitious as were all great men of antiquity, and knowing their religion to be fairy lore, they believed in and dreaded fate.

"You talk like an artist," he said, as with a sudden inspiration, "and the gods have sent you here to do me a rare service. Can you be depended on?" he asked, tapping me friendlwise on the shoulder.

"I am no less trustworthy," I answered with decision, "than the Italian Government itself"

"I have had enough," he began, turning full upon me, "of the attack and defence which make up a soldier's life. I hate the city, with its weary, envious, disappointed swarm. I have had overmuch of things that come and go like gilded galleys. I wish to fill a beaker with the richness of solitude with Cythera and drain it to the lees. For the great world, it will content me to be an onlooker—a panther crouched on the bough. Age has its October sunshine, when I can sit at home with Homer, counting the gold of what is past and laughing at the insolence of the Forum. But there is a fly in my wine which you alone can remove. I am plagued by an undefined misgiving that Decius—my own son, mind you—looks amorously upon the girl to whom I am betrothed. Wherefore I wish you to exercise immediately this art you understand so well, and transport him with yourself to the far land whence you came."

"What am I to do there with Decius?" I ejaculated, aghast at the demand

The Centurion, still clasping and unclasping his hands, eyed me with amusement. "You will be great," he said, "even in small things. Take him to your sanctuary and be to him as a younger brother. Yield to him in all things, for, like me, he is wont to rule. If thwarted he will surely kill you—not that one of your courage shuns death, for it is a man's life, not his ending, that matters I do not wish to harm Decius—is he not my son? But he is horribly in my way—wherefore in Jove's name take him and go"

"Vaini!" I interrupted furiously, "much as I love you, this is beyond a jest"

The Roman heeded not, adding, with my tutor's Dantesque twist of the lips in his smile: "Things are sometimes adamant, but men and women can be bent or broken. I will bring Decius, and you shall take him by the hand. You understand the use of the talisman, which consists in fixing the thought upon a star called the Weaving Maiden, which possesses the Secret of the Seven South Streams. Cast the stone into fresh water—not salt—and together you will vanish." So saying Vaini turned with a careless nod, and a departing nightmare

leaves no profounder relief than I felt at seeing my Centurion-tutor stride lightly away.

At the sound of a softer footfall on the grass, I glanced behind me and beheld Puteolana. Something drew me irresistibly near, with an impulse grown suddenly tender. Upon her face was the radiant pagan delight in the health and beauty of the physical body. In that enchanted hour she seemed the incarnate youth of all antiquity—an embodiment of ancient graceful things that I had mused upon and learned to love, and that I now found bright-eyed and golden-haired and beautiful beyond the poetry of thought.

"My father seeks you," she said, with a ripple of mirth. "You are to buy this villa, after which you can bid both Enceladus and Decius begone." Then with a merry laugh she added, "It is to be yours for only six hundred thousand sesterces,—he swears, by Hercules, it is given away."

It flashed upon me that such a possession was indeed the ghistening jewel I had sought through half a lifetime. With unaccustomed audacity I caught Cythera's hand, and, surprised at my boldness, murmured,—"Flowers, music, wine . . . this splendid sunshine . . . . and you!"

"My father's counsel," she interrupted, a sudden passion thrilling the undertone of her voice, "is not mine. You have come from some rare domain, beyond the edge of things we know. You are here in imminent danger between two violent men. There came with you a sinister-visaged scholar, a half-fed, mournful shade. He has vanished, and what has befallen him? Are not you in like jeopardy? Wherefore, for your own sake, escape while you may, and thank whatever gods there be."

"Can I forget," I answered, "that your peril is greater than mine, or could I leave you to face it alone! To what extremity may not Enceladus go when he learns that you—his affianced when he went hence—are now, on his return, betrothed to Decius?"

The girl stood silent, her face darkening a little at my words; perhaps this was but one of the subtle veils the afternoon was leaving. At that tranquil moment I divined the salutation the passing day receives at sunset from the setting sun.

"It seems a kiss," I whispered, "when twilight touches the dark—a kiss thrilling with thought of happy things past or to come. For whom the omen, if not for you and me?"

As I spoke the woodpecker in the atrium tapped on his perch—a solemn sound, as though some guardian of the bourne wherein I was trespassing had warned back an intruder.

Instinctively we glanced through the half-drawn curtains, and beheld Decius approaching, doubtless seeking to elude his father. At sight of me his sullen face lightened, and he addressed me with words of intense emotion. As he spoke, Cythera moved to the Egyptian harp and ran her fingers over its strings, the fine accords seeming a setting to his words. Once, years before, I had heard a song within a song, wherein the double harmony rang true, and the meaning of the one gave profounder significance to the other. Each was distinct in melody—each beautiful as a shower of falling stars. Now, though the words and music were interwoven, I read in Cythera's eyes the veiled import of that heart-beat cadence, and understood that she too was speaking with wistful entreaty—faint as the whisper of falling leaves.

The persuasive phrases of Decius disconcerted me. I should not have looked for such warmth from one whose shallow selfish nature stood self-revealed. Yet I have rarely listened to a more earnest appeal, a trifle theatrical in its declamation,

but urged with force and with a grace of rendering to which none could have listened unmoved.

"Let us consider," I said, "precisely what it is you wish me to do." At this he clasped me in his arms—and as he did so, Cythera walked away

"I alone," he ejaculated, "believe you human and not the phantom Appian says. The art which brought you here can transport you back whence you came, and whoever touches you at that instant will likewise vanish away. What I ask is this. Take my father presently by the hand and will him with yourself to Ultima Thule. My father is not too old to be useful; there are years of labour in that iron frame. Remember it is you that have brought upon us his calamitous presence."

The truth forced itself upon me with startling distinctness that I was but an unbidden stranger among these people, an unwelcome visitor at that. Their hates and loves were not for me to meddle with—any heedless trifling might be the means of irreparable wrong. My eyes rested on the wall opposite, where, painted with marvellous foreshortening, the Laocoon struggled with his serpents and turned upon me an anguished face. I glanced back at Decius, and beheld the same tormented spirit.

"If," I said, quite vanquished, "you bring the Centurion to me and place his hand in mine . . . ."

Then, as Decius nodded, I remembered Cythera's harp-song, and my voice fell

IV.

The day had lapsed to calm, the grape leaves mellowing on the sun-browned wall, the sea reflecting a cobalt blue. Beneath the cliff were foamy shallows grown almost still, and across the Bay Vesuvius was faintly stained with sunset shafts, that changed its white wreath to a rust-red smoke. Behind me stretched the upland woods, where to this day dwell the cool winds and the silent shadows. In the repose of such a scene, may not we deem that something of the inspiration overhead—the flash of ascending wings and amorous whisper of leaves—passes, half felt, into the life beneath!

"Yes," murmured Cythera's voice, "though faint as a breath-stain on a mirror, they shall outlast the things we shape and fashion for eternity."

To my wonder the tears were starting from her eyes. At that instant I heard the chimes of dear old Nineteenth-Century San Vincenzo, followed by the droning of a priest before the altar where floats a glorified Madonna. And to this day, when church bells chime and anthems swell, I see Cythera's face transfigured beyond the tears of earth!

These familiar sounds of modern Sorrento startled me with their evidence that the figure before me, and the Roman villa and the metempsychosis of Vaini were hallucinations frail as those marvels of alchemy a word sufficed to shatter. Yet how vivid the illusion! How present in Cythera was the imaginative realism of the antique mind, how natural seemed her physical being, even to the white scar on her arm where in childhood the flesh had been lacerated by some animal's teeth! We stood thus, looking into one another's eyes, while the brief moments flew all too quickly. At her neck hung an amulet bearing the Greek word Εὐχώλα, *Be of good courage*, and this I raised to decipher in the sunshine. As the hours passed it seemed to me we came to speak a language familiar to us both. How often have I sought to recall its fluent phrases, wherein the meaning leaped almost before the spoken word! And standing thus beside this unhappy girl, the thought flashed in my mind, After the expectancy of years,

"He understood, and with a final effort came towards us, tore the onyx from me and sent it whirling far into the sea."

must her waiting be all for nought? The onyx was in my hand, and its use had been explained. Now that Vaini had taken on a new and fearful nature, I had no stronger wish than to escape him. Suppose that, instead of awaiting his return with Decius, I took Cythera's hand and willed us both away! Could I but breathe into her being the soul of an intense desire, might not I draw her from one world to another—even into the refuge of my own life?

The sun was sinking in the emerald sea and sparkling in Cythera's hair. About us was that twitter wherein mating birds exchange their gentle promises,—not as feigning poets that sing for others, but in a passion all their own. Beside me was the splash of water falling from the fountain's marble edge, and bearing to my fancy a meaning of musical enchantment.

"Puteolana," I murmured, "you say that you have waited many lifetimes,—who can affirm that I have not likewise been awaiting you, unconsciously, as darkness waits the dawn? Are not the paths of the Immortals at the edge of the clouds? Wherefore let us master Fate and gain our own. Link your destiny with mine, and far hence together we will watch the twilight weave, and whisper to each other the words that none but lovers speak. By Hera, to whom do we belong if not to those we love?"

"It is so strangely sudden," cried the girl, drawing back, her face filled with the softness of Italian summer.

"The best things in life," I answered, "come swiftly and unaware."

"Dare I trust myself with a new-found friend without so much as waiting for a father's benediction?"

"If you delay," I replied, "your father will give you with his benediction to Enceladus."

Her hand was in mine, and I had raised the magic stone, and was about to plunge it in the impluvium, when a violent crash of something overturned resounded.

At the end of the peristyle a blue bowl of roses had been thrown from its pedestal, and on the ground beside its fragments lay Decius. Before him stood Vaini, his face ablaze. It was easy to guess that Decius had revealed his own betrothal to Cythera, that the Centurion had struck his son violently to earth, and now Decius arose and paused menacing, vindictive, evil-eyed.

Was I about to behold a tragedy of Roman days!

An angry flush suffused the young man's countenance, and there were flecks of bloody froth upon his tunic. Appian, with white frightened face, had tried to separate the struggling men, and now, seemingly beside himself, was spinning round like a mad dog. Near by stood the hunchback, convulsed with fiendish glee.

Then with deadly swiftness Decius fled away, reappearing at an upper window with a Numidian bow and arrows. One of these he fitted with deliberation to the string, and discharged it as Vaini turned, the shaft striking edgewise and sinking through the face. A second pierced the shoulder as the Centurion sprang towards the stair and drew his sword. The sound of a scuffle followed, then Decius was flung headlong from the window, and lay where he fell.

"*Habet!*" cried Vaini, calmly wiping his sword. "*Habet!*" he repeated, with exultant pleasure, as though the word rang with joy. Then he descended to the fountain, and carefully bathed his wounds. Suddenly he straightened with a slight convulsion . . . the Numidian arrows were poisoned.

My eyes were riveted upon the pallor of his face and on his quivering lips. I was about to witness how the last of the Tenth Legion could die without fear, repentance, or benedicite.

As though wondering at my presence his lurid gaze fastened upon me standing

with Cythera's hand in mine, and the talisman in my grasp. Then . . . he understood, and with a final effort came towards us, tore the onyx from me and sent it whirling far into the sea. I heard a deep sob wrenched from his fainting heart, then his hands clutched at the overleaning myrtle, and sinking to earth he covered his face. What triumph must have filled that last conscious instant, for though Puteolana was lost to him, she was equally beyond the reach of Decius or of me!

Where the stone fell among the ripples I seemed to see a flash of fire. At its contact with salt water the Pompeian atrium shrivelled with a fluttering roll. The ground lurched like the deck of a sinking ship, and I staggered as though struck by a wave. I was conscious of having touched the revelation that centuries have groped for—yet fallen one step short of the goal. Instinctively I turned towards Cythera, and for a bewildered instant—the space of one long heart-beat—gazed fixedly upon her. I knew it was my last look upon the face I should remember and dream of, but never again behold. It was the moment's pause between sound and silence as I listened to her murmur-voiced adieu.

"You will come back for me some day," she whispered. "I shall be near—no further than the vanished morning from afternoon. In some life, somewhere, you shall find me again."

The words died, and her last movement was an outstretched hand,—then the brilliant figure faded, and in its place the lilac bush of Varni's garden appeared, its sun-shot branches suddenly radiant with extraordinary splendour.

* * * * * * *

I was lying on the ground, and beside me sat Varni staring vacantly at the sea where a moment before he had cast the Mist Stone. The resemblance remained so strong that for an instant I thought it was Enceladus. But the Roman Villa had left no trace, and in its stead rose the modern house and orange grove. Near by waited Pasquale, holding a watering-can, which he must have emptied over me, for I was half drenched.

"Thank God, dear Master," I exclaimed, "you are still alive! Oblige me by looking behind the lilac bush—Puteolana may still be there. And yet I fear the sunset . . ."

"Sunset!" impatiently echoed Varni,—"it is high noon: the clock marks a quarter-past twelve."

"Cythera will vanish while we talk."

"Puteolana . . . Cythera . . . two young women! Companion of my studies, how often have I warned you against this taste for doubtful adventure?"

"There was but one—you took her from me an instant ago. And how can you say it is high noon, when a moment since the sun was sinking behind Ischia! Oh, Varni, such an hour as I have spent would redeem the commonplace of a lifetime."

"The sun is indeed warm to-day," assented my tutor, with a soft whistle; "and by St. Peter it is a dizzy world. Friend of my soul, you should not take two cups of coffee at breakfast."

"An occult force," I interrupted, "lingering pent up through the ages, has been brought to life. It is the long arm of coincidence."

"Carissimo, it is the long bow of coincidence, but the bow if bent too far will break. Pasquale, throw more water over his head."

"It was not a long bow that Decius bent, but a short one, and the arrows were poisoned. One struck you in the face . . . strange it has left no wound. How many hours did the experiment last?"

"Hours!" murmured the wise man, laying his hand upon my pulse—"it is but fifteen minutes since it commenced, and five since your folly ended it. We had just brought the Roman Villa into view when you snatched the onyx from me. Then you rushed about, talking and gesticulating wildly. Pasquale and I were struggling with you till you flung it over the cliff and reeled to the ground."

"But you," I retorted, "were there with me, disguised as Enceladus. At one moment I feared you would draw that short sword and do me a mischief."

"I almost wish I had," replied my tutor, "before you cast my treasure into the sea. There are many border-lands, and you may have slipped across one of them for ten minutes. If indeed you penetrated the atrium of the ancient world, it is but too evident that you have destroyed its signboard. Wherefore not another word, or you will rouse Homeric laughter."

* * * * * * *

It is eleven years since these things happened, and now that Vaini is no more, and the sun-resplendent villa that he loved is mine, I walk with him in memory amid the half-light of its orange grove, and trace again those darkling ways through which he sent me an unmeasured distance.

I study the wall-bound winding lanes of my garden in the aspect of all hours and seasons. I sit beneath the myrtles, where the cloister dips, and watch the sparkle upon the under-water blue. The sunshine paints its arabesques upon Vesuvius. Above the Monastery buttress hang sprays of silver shaft and farewell summer, weaving their tendrils in tapestry. Here for a thousand years olive after olive has grown, each in turn uplifting its boughs of velvet-grey. From a distance comes the vibrant piping of a hermit thrush, and I remember the thrill of the Spartan flute and the broken heart of its music. Day mellows, and flushes Posilipo and Nisida and all these opalescent shores Poseidon loved. There is in the air a sense of faint, far voices. Overhead, at night, the great star garden kindles with a meaning the ancients thought to read. Yonder, amid the windrift of last summer's leaves, is the fountain, unearthed when the *Caserma del Gesù* was building, four hundred years ago, wherein I saw the Greek girl dip her hands and drink. In the twilight of early morning those Spartan maidens still scatter my borders with wild violets, each May-time the poppies I remember touch its greensward with their Roman gold.

Idling amid the orange trees and ilexes, I am conscious that I stand amid the Poets. Through many a long mid-afternoon the sea beckons with white hands and I mark the flush fade upon the enclasping hills. A voice speaks; for who, appealing to Nature, goes wholly without response? Yes, a voice speaks, for the coralline lilac bush remains the living inspiration of my garden. Through the drapery of its pink flakes I first beheld Puteolana, and to this day I instinctively glance behind its crimsoning spray with a thought ever sweet and wild. The branch her eyes beheld in bloom is blooming now. The breeze blows a flavour of romance through those fine blossoms, as though they were the living foliage of many faded summers. I cannot hear Cythera speak—her voice sinks across the centuries, yet when the song-bird calls—pleading, passionate, irresistible—I turn with sudden emotion. Its leaves renew the touch of flower-soft fingers. And I ask myself if a tree so beautiful, so mindful of the seasons, so responsive to sunshine and to shade, has not some living consciousness—some subtle sense of dreams!

Thus musing, my thoughts fly ever to the bourne wherein I trace that transfigured hour I lived in the ancient world. Half my life has been illumined by the afterglow

of a day. I fancy Cythera standing where I beheld her as the centuries surged between us. I meditate upon the link which for a moment brought our lives in contact, and delight myself with the belief that, however frail, it is imperishable. Does she too walk these quiet paths at evenfall, and is the Villa as present to her as to me? Or is hers the living reality, and am I but the phantom of a day? A leaf from the tree-top flutters and falls to the ground—and I know that when I am dead I shall remember Cythera and the touch of her velvet lips.

WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

"Through many a long mid-afternoon the sea beckons with white hands, and I mark the flush fade upon the encircling hills"

THE INDIAN'S VENGEANCE

ILLUSTRATED BY CYRUS CUNEO.

BY LAWRENCE MOTT

THE sun rose clear and strong over the silent forests, and shot long golden paths on the sullen moving waters of the Albany River. It was midsummer, and the dark green of the fir and pine stood out in sharp relief against the lighter shades of the hard wood ridges. Far off a range of mountain heights loomed heavy and massive, a wavering line reaching up towards the pale tinted skies.

In a clearing, surrounded by alder bush and growing hemlock, stood a little log hut; prim and severe it seemed in the blaze of forest colour. Below it the river flowed silently on, its flat surface broken only by eddies, and burdened with white froth that floated down from the falls, whose roar came faintly through the trees. Two birch-bark canoes were drawn on the shale, their yellow sides shining with the night's dew. The split-board door of the hut opened suddenly with a jerk; Jim Blake, trapper, stepped out.

"Tom said as how it 'ud be a fine day," he yawned, stretching his long wiry arms. He turned and stuck his head through the door. "Tom! Tom! get up, ye lazy scamp! Th' sun's hour-high!" Without waiting to see the result of his call, Blake went down to the river, rolled up his tanned skin shirt-sleeves, and "washed." Having thoroughly spattered himself, snorted and gurgled, he drew an old rag from under one of the canoes and made a pretence at drying his dripping face and hair.

"Gosh all hemlock, ye'r the ornerest cuss fur washin' an swabbin' yer carkiss ever I see!" Tom, his partner, shouted from the bank.

The other peered at him through the holes in the rag. "Bet yer life; but y' don't care how dirty y'are!"

"Naw, why fur? The more good old dirt the less the blamed flies bothers," Tom answered, pulling on his long moccasins. "What I ye hev fur breakfus'?"

"Gol! I clean furgot thet our meenew 'lowed much o' a choice in vittles."

Jim clambered up the steep little bank and stood beside the other. Both large raw boned powerful men were these two that lived in the absolute wilderness, and both big-hearted, rough creatures of Nature's own making.

"Say, Tom,"—Blake put his scarred hand on the younger man's shoulder,—"honest, now d'y' think thet Ah-teg stoled them furs? Kinder 'pears ter me thet As-sin-ab is the wust critter o' th' two."

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The other stared thoughtfully across the now white-shining river. "Wall, I dunno: Ah-teg is 'n bad company with thet other skunk Indian, an' I think as how we'd oughter go up an' larrup the the two on 'em jes' on gineral principles."

Jim laughed quietly. "Le's eat fust."

They went indoors, and while one shaved a bit of dry wood for kindlings the other got out the bread, salt and tea, and a lump of pork. From a bag that hung outside he brought in some caribou meat cut in long thin strips; then he cooked on the little stove, in which a bright fire crackled and snapped. The appetising odours of frying meat soon filled the pine-scented interior, and particles of pork fat sputtered angrily on the hot metal.

"Damn, I put in too much tea!" and Tom made a dive with a tin spoon into the boiling kettle. "Ouch, damn twicet! I bu'nned meself!"

"Easy, son, easy! ye always jump too quick, an' when ye finds thet out ye jump agin', makin' two breaks 'stead o' one, see?"

"Shut up!" Tom growled good-naturedly, "'r I'll pour it all over y'!"

The two then ate in silence, the rattling of the tin plates and cups sounding harshly loud in the little room. Just as they were finishing two shadows fell athwart the rude table. Blake looked up.

"Damn' if it ain't Ah teg! An' who've ye got with ye?" he asked, seeing the tall gaunt Indians standing impassive in the doorway. The one he had addressed moved forward and squatted near the stove. His keen black eyes roved around, noticing every thing.

"As-sin-ab," he answered gutturally, waving his brown hand towards his companion, who sat cross-legged on the threshold.

Meanwhile Tom was clearing up the breakfast remains. Ah-teg reached out and took the meat that was left, tore it in two, and threw a piece to his friend.

"We hon-gre-e," he said, as he munched slowly.

There was a silence. Jim filled his pipe and lighted it; Tom sat on the table swinging his legs. The Indians gravely wiped their hands on their leggings, then Ah-teg stood up.

"We come, Ogama (Chief), to ask white man counsel. Our medicine man no tell what Missen-abe (Indian) want to know. In white man hunting ground can Ogama an' fr'en have same squaw?"

Blake smiled; then, not wishing to hurt the Indian's feelings, he answered gravely, "No, white man have squaw for himself."

"Miguetch" (thanks). Ah-teg turned to go.

"Hold on a min'te: hev' ye got any fur to trade?" Jim asked.

The bronze face looked steadily at him. "Ogama know no fur when Tebek-te-ge-sis (moon) hot, an' Ah-teg no steal white man ad-ik (beaver)! Ah-teg see cache open when de leaf come out." With these words the Indian stalked away, his companion following closely, their light blankets fluttering in the breeze.

"Wall, wouldn't thet h'ist ye?" Tom said in amazement: "how in all tarnation did they know we suspicioned 'em of breakin' our cache?"

"They'r pretty sharp, them Indians: I axed Ah-teg too snddint like 'bout fur, I guess. Shoo, thet's too bad altogether; thar hain't no use in tryin' ter find out now!" Jim sucked viciously at his pipe for a few moments. "Where 've I see'd that As-sin-ab afore?" he muttered to himself then.

"He looks a heap like one o' the critters we knowed down in th' Pine Creek country when we was workin' thar'," Tom suggested.

Blake leaped to his feet. "By thunder, son, ye'r dead right! I recolleet him now: he's the sucker thet won a quarter o' caribou when we was asleep, d'ye mind?"

"Sure!" the other answered; "an' I'll bet a week's fur thet them two broke our cache!"

"Cain't do nawthin' 'bout it—leastways not now nohow!" and Blake spat angrily at the wood box. "Hell!"

They sat there idly watching the long grasses in the clearing wave and bow in the wind; and Jim's eyes became fixed on a mother sheldrake and her brood of young ones, that disported themselves on the river in front of the hut.

"Fool bird!" he whispered, but Blake heard.

"Why?"

"Don't know nawthin' 'tall; wouldn't hev so many little ones, thet only get eat up by pike an' sich, if she did!"

"I'm agoin' ter pull th' net; those dogs hain't had a bite since yes'erday mornin'," Blake said, got up, went down to the canoes, shoved one in the water and paddled off down stream. Tom still

sat in his place on the table; suddenly he saw something shining on the floor where As-sin-ab had sat. He went over and picked it up.

"Where 'd thet cuss get this?" he asked aloud, staring at the little round brass button in his hand. He looked closely at it, went out into the strong light and puzzled the dented surface into a meaning. "R—N—W—M—P," he said slowly. "R—N—W—M—P? Why, holy smoke, this is a p'lice button, an' last winter one o' them feller's hosses come in to Longue Lac alone; they didn't never find th' feller neither! Now I—wonderif——? By golly, I'll bet my hand thet's it!" he shouted.

A curious silence followed the sound of his voice. He felt it; even the wind lulled, and the grasses ceased waving. He ran round the corner of the hut, somehow feeling a presence. The alders were agitated: he rushed among them, and stopped, listening. An instant's crackling, then deep stillness until the wind puffs whispered again among the boughs; beyond that—nothing.

"By G——, thet sneakin' devil come back fer to try an' git *this*!" he cursed, as he went back; "now I *know*!"

He sat on the bank, thinking it all over, when Blake came back.

"Any fish?"

"A few trout, couple o' good ones, an' a mess o' suckers."

Jim told the other the story of the button.

Blake listened quietly. "Wall, an' what kin y' do 'bout it? Ye cain't prove nawthin'—not a blamed thing!"

"I don't sepose we can, wuss luck; but I'll find out some day fer sure, see if I don't!"

They fed their twelve dogs, sewed some new mocassins for the winter, then travelled through the woods ten miles to the Indian camp. There was nothing there! Tepees all gone, only the tall lonely frames standing in semicircles were left. Charred embers of the fires were still warm, tea-leaves were still moist on the ground, that was all.

"Funny they 'll out so suddint!" Jim said thoughtfully.

"Yep, thar's a row o' some kind on, sure!" and Tom's face looked worried.

Overhead great wind-clouds whirled along, casting heavy shadows now and then over the empty camping-place. A grove of high pines surrounded the spot, and the steadily growing wind whistled mournfully through the needled branches. The two went home again, and talked till long in the night.

The late summer months passed quickly, Tom and Blake blazing new trails, building traps, making snowshoes, and stiffening up their log cabin to withstand the furious winter storms and snows. Thus the autumn came and went. The two laid in a supply of caribou and bear meat, so that when at last Jim woke up one morning to find the ground deep covered with white, they were ready for it.

"I see'd a long shoe track to-day, Tom," Blake announced one night in January, as he came in from the bitter cold evening air. "Traps warn't tetched though; did purty fair this trip," he continued, throwing off his fur bag.

"Whar 'd ye see it?"

"D'ye mind th' place whar you an' me sot out thet bunch o' saple traps, all clost t'gether?"

The other nodded.

"Right thar, leadin' nigh onto sou'-west."

"He must hev gon ercrost th' Long Barren, then, 'cause thar ain't no way in this heft o' snow to git round either side."

"I guess thet's so." Jim pulled off his wet socks and woollen trousers. "I'm dog-tired. Give us a snack, an' I'll bunk early."

The next morning the two were off soon after light, each working his own trap lines. Tom was travelling south, towards the Long Barren, when he suddenly came across a sledge trail. He followed it a short distance.

"Who in thunder is this?" he muttered, growing excited as he saw the track led straight on for the Giant Split, as it was called, a deep crevasse between two rock ridges. "Damn' fools, don't know much 'bout th' lay o' land!" He followed a bit farther; then, as the sun was getting down towards its chilling horizon, he turned back for home.

"Curse it all, Jim, I don't half like this business: if it was squar' Indians they'd come to us, 'cause they've see'd our lines alright 'nuff!" he said, as the two sat at the stove-side.

He was interrupted by the sudden quiet opening of the door; a blanket shrouded and muffled figure came in, carrying snow-shoes. The man unwound his coverings. "How, Ogama!" It was Ah-teg.

"Whut ye doin' round here?" Blake asked, keeping back the surprise he felt.

—'Look!' he muttered hoarsely—'Look!

The Indian had moved up to the stove. "Ah-teg come tell Ogama story." He pulled out an old clay pipe and lighted it. "Ski-di-wa-bo?" (whisky). Tom gave him a tablespoonful of their one-bottle supply. The Indian puffed stolidly, then he looked up and his eyes were flashing fire, though his voice was low and soft.

"Ogama rememb' when Ah-teg come, As-sin-ab too, for white man counsel?"

Blake nodded.

"Ogama rememb' counsel he give Ah-teg?"

Blake nodded again.

"Ah-teg, As-sin-ab want same squaw. Say do what Ogama counsel. Ogama say white man have one squaw self. Ah-teg get squaw, for Ah-teg heap rich Missen-abe in tribe. As-sin-ab took squaw—go 'way far; Ah-teg follow fast lak de am-ik (caribou). No find, no catch. See trail, follow all time. Near to dead, see?" He drew aside his long beaded shirt and showed a body worn to skin and bone. Then he smoked again.

The two listened as though in a trance, so magnetic was the soft purring voice in which lurked the Indian's relentless vengeance.

"Ah-teg heap great think; follow more fast, drive As-sin-ab up mountain—no catch. Follow more an' find to-day track of Ah-teg, his squaw, and As-sin-ab where two fall in de mouth of land."

"Thet was their track I seed ter-day," Tom interrupted eagerly.

The Indian looked at him, and a grim smile fled across the thin tight lips. "Young Ogama lak young eagle, mak' heap noise, no feathers, no fly!"

"Thar's an end to it, then, eh?" Blake asked, reaching for a match. His hand stopped half way as the Indian rose.

Fierce and wild he looked in the candle-light, standing there, his feet apart, his head thrown back, his long black hair falling in rigid lines about his pain-furrowed face. His eyes burned and glowed in their sockets, and his nostrils quivered like those of a well-bred horse. "End, Ogama say?" The world of sarcasm in the ever purring voice stung like a whip.

"Thet's what I said—end; and what can Ah-teg do?"

"Ah-teg can kill, kill, kill!" came the breathless answer.

"How if they're dead in the Split?"

"Ogama no know the Missen-abe live like animal after dead?"

"Shucks, rot, hell, anything!" Tom blurted out.

The tall Indian looked at him in withering contempt, then turned to Blake. "Will Ogama lend Ah-teg gun?"

"What fer?"

In majestic silence the Indian lifted his hand till the fingers pointed straight at the trapper. "De Manito he tell Ah-teg dat As-sin-ab is fox now, an' dat Ah-teg squaw is Wa-ba-boos (white rabbit). As-sin-ab he kill man of Great White Squaw, an'——"

"'Th' p'lheeman! I knowed I was right!" Tom rubbed his hands in glee. The Indian paid no attention.

"An' great Manito tell Ah-teg to shoot self in head, then Ah-teg be wolf and kill, kill, kill. Give—gun!"

Hypnotised by the black eyes that stared through and through him, Blake reached slowly for the rifle, and handed it to the Indian. With a wild ringing cry Ah-teg cocked it, put it to his head, between his eyes, and pulled the trigger. He dropped, a lifeless heap.

The two stared; the silence was absolute.

"My God!" Tom whispered in awe: "my God!"

All night they talked in whispers, not daring to move the body, so strong had been the Indian's power. At daylight Jim looked out. It had began to snow, and the white particles floated down in silent myriads.

"We'd best go to the traps this mornin', Tom; we'll lose fur if we don't; we can bury—him—this arternoon."

They started out together tacitly, neither caring to be alone. Blake was in the lead as they came to the Split, which they had to cross. He stopped, shaking all over. "Look!" he muttered hoarsely, "look!"

On the far side of the Split, just where a sledge trail led into the soft, engulfing, choking snow, sat a timber wolf, it watched them steadily.

"At its feet, man—at its feet," Tom whimpered.

There, under the half-open jaws, with the drool dripping slowly on them, lay the dead bodies of a white rabbit and a fox.

The two turned and sped away, the lone great wolf watching them disappear in the snowy distance.

"At dawn he was seen riding a huge black charger."

THE KING OF YS AND DAHUT THE RED.

BY FIONA MACLEOD (THE LATE WILLIAM SHARP).

ILLUSTRATED BY C. M. WATTS.

IN the days when Gradlon was Conan of Arvor, or High-King of the Armorican races who peopled Brittany, there was no name greater than his. From the sand dunes of the Jutes and Angles to where the dark-skinned Basque fishermen caught fish with nets, the name of Gradlon was a sound for silence. Arvor was become so great a land that Franks were called wolves there, and like wolves were hunted down. The wild cry that survives to this day in the forests of Dualt and Huelgoet, in the granite heart of Cornouailles, *A'hr bleiz! A'hr bleiz!* was heard often then: but no wolf ever so dreaded the cry as the haggard Frankish fugitives.

Gradlon, Conan of Arvor, was in the midway of life when for once he stanched the thirst of his sword. This was when he went over into the lands of the Kymry, the elder brothers of his Armorican race, and there fought with them against Saxon hordes, till the red tide ebbed. Thereafter he had gone far northward, till the Oelian Gaels hated the singing of Breton shafts, and till the mountain tribes of the Picts paid tribute.

Thence, at last, he returned. When he came to his own land, he brought with him two treasures which he held chief among all treasures he had won: a black stallion, and a woman white as cream, with eyes like blue lochs, and with long great masses of hair red as the bronze-red berry of the wild ash. The name of the horse was Morvark; the name of the woman, Malgven. When men spoke of the Tameless One they meant Morvark: and after a time they seldom said Malgven, but "the Queen," because Gradlon made her the Terror of Arvor, or "the White Queen," because of her foam-white beauty, or the "Red Queen," because of her masses of ruddy hair, which, when unfastened, was as a stream of blood falling over a white cliff.

None knew whence Morvark came, nor whence Malgven. What passed from hp to hp was this: that the great black tameless stallion was fouled of no earthly mare, but of some strange and terrible sea-beast. It had come out of the North on a day of tempest. Amid the screaming of the gale in the haven where Gradlon and the men of Arvor were, a more wild, a more savage screaming had been heard. Gradlon went forth alone, and at dawn he was seen riding on a huge black charger, which neighed with a cry like the cry of the sea-wind, and whose hoofs trampled the wet sands with a sound like the clashing of waves. The hair of Gradlon was streaming out on the wind like yellow seaweed on a rushing ebb; his laughter was like the hallala leaping of billows; his eyes were wild as falling stars.

It was when far in the Alban northlands that the Breton King and Malgven were first seen together. She was not a conquest of the sword. The rumour by the fires had it that she was the queen of a great prince among the Gaels; that she was wife to the King of the Picts, that she was of the fair, perilous people of Lochlin, who were even then seizing for their own the Alban isles and western lands. But one saying was common with all: that she was a woman of dark powers. One and all dreaded her sorceries. Gradlon laughed at these when she was not by, but swore that there had never been since the first woman so great a sorceress over the heart of man.

For many months they were together in Alba, nor did once Malgven sigh for the place or the man she had left, nor did ever any herald come to Gradlon calling upon him to give up the woman. When she had learned the Armorican tongue she spoke to some of the Breton chiefs, but she had eyes for one man only. She loved Gradlon as he loved her. When they asked her concerning her people, she looked at them till they were troubled, then she answered, "I was born of the Wind and the Sea": and, troubled more, they asked no further.

It was when they were upon the sea, off the Cymric coasts, that the child of Malgven was born. For three days before that birthing, strange voices were heard rising from the depths. In the hollow of following waves the long-dead were seen. In the moonshine the flying foam was woven into white robes, wherefrom shining eyes, calm and august, or filled with communicating terror, looked upon the trembling seamen.

On the third day white calms prevailed. At sundown the web of dusk was woven out of the sea, till it rose in purple darkness and hung from the Silver Apples, the Great Galley, the Hounds, the Star of the North, and the Evening Star. At the rising of the moon a sudden froth ran along the black lips of the sea. A Voice moaned beneath the travelling feet of the waves, and trembled against the stars. Men, staring into the moving gulfs beneath them, beheld vast irresolute hands, as of a Swimmer who carried Ocean upon his unfathomable brows, others, staring upward into the dust of the Milky Way, discerned eyebrows terrible as comets, and beneath them pale orbs as of forgotten moons, with long wind-uplifted hair blowing from old worlds idly swinging in the abyss, far back into the starless inlands of the Silent King.

And as that Breath arose, the knees of the seafarers were as reeds in shaken water. An old druid of the Gaels whispered *Mananann! O Mananann!*

Gradlon the king lay upon the fells of she-wolves, and bit his lips, and muttered that if a man spoke he would take his heart from him and throw it to the filmy beasts of the sea.

It was then that Malgven's labour was done; and a woman-child came forth, and at the first cry of the child the Voice that was a Breath ceased. And when there was no more any moaning of the unnumbered, cries and laughters came from the deeps, and like a flash of wings meteors fled by, and beyond the unsteady masts were sudden green and blue flames, plumes worn by demons whose meeting pinions were made of shadow, and beyond these the dancing of the little stars.

And by these portents Gradlon was troubled. But Malgven smiled and said: "Let the girl be called Dahut, Wonder, for truly her beauty shall be the wonder of all who come after us. She is but a little foam-white human child: but the sea is in her veins, and her eyes are two fallen stars. Her voice will be the mysterious voice of the sea, her eyes will be the mysterious light within the sea: therefore let her be called Dahut. She shall be the little torch at the end, for me, Malgven: she shall be the Star of Death for the multitude whom she will slay with love. she shall be the doom of thee and thine and thy people and the kingdom that is thine, O Gradlon, Conan of Arvor: therefore let her be called Dahut, Wonder; Dahut, the sweet evil singing of the sea; Dahut, Blind Love; Dahut, the Laugher; Dahut, Death. Yea, let her be called Dahut, O Gradlon, she to whom I have given more than other women give to those whom they bear: for I am of those children of Danù of whom you have heard strange tales, of those Tuath-De-Danann whose lances made of moonshine can pierce granite walls, and whose wisdom is more old than the ancient forgotten cromlechs in your land and in mine, and

whose pleasure it is to dwell where are the palaces of the Sídhe, that are wherever green hills grow dim and pale and blue as the smoke above woods."

Thus was it that the sea-born child of Gradlon of Arvor and Malgven the Dannite was called Dahut.

When the Armoricans returned to their own land, the brother of Gradlon whom he had made Tanist or vice-regent welcomed Gradlon, for their father, the old King of Cornonailles, still lived, though blind from the Gaulish arrow which had crossed his face slantwise in a great battle on the banks of the Loire. It was not till the seventh year thereafter that Gradlon again fared far. For three years he was among the Kymry, the Alban Gaels, the Picts, the Islesmen, the Gaels of Eiré, the Gaels of Enona. Then, when he was in that land which is now called Anglesey, a deep craving and weariness came upon him to see Malgven again, though less than a year back had she gone from him, to rule in Arvor in his place; for Arz his brother had been slain in a Frankish foray.

Her beauty was so great that he wore the days in sorrow because of it. When he arose at dawn it flashed against his eyes out of the rising sun: when he looked at the sea, it moved from wave to wave, and beckoned to him: when he stared at the cloud-shadowed hills, he saw it lying there adream: when he fared forth at the rising of the moon it took him subtly, now with a birch branch that caught his hair as often it had tangled with Malgven's long curling locks, now with the brushing of tall fern that was a sound like the rustling of her white robe, now because of two stars shining low above dewy grass, which were as her shining eyes.

"A sudden froth ran along the black lips of the sea."

There was no woman in the world so beautiful, he knew: and yet both men and women prophesied that Dahut would be more beautiful still—Dahut the Red, as the girl was already called because of her ruddy bronze-hued hair, wonderful in mass and colour as was that of her mother: more wonderful far, said Malgven, smiling proudly, who knew Dahut to be of the Tuath-De Danaan, even as her mother was, and that she would be a torch to light many flames and mayhap fires vast and incalculable.

So one day Gradlon arose and said,

"For Dahut," and broke his sword: and said, "For Arvor," and broke his spear: and said, "For Malgven," and bade every prisoner be set free, and the ships be filled with treasure and provision.

When he saw the black rocky coasts of Finistère once more he swore a vow that he would never again leave his land, or Malgven. Everywhere, as he journeyed to Kempêr, he heard the rumour of the Red Queen's greatness, of her terrible beauty, of Dahut the Beautiful, Dahut the Perilous, Dahut the Sorceress. And he laughed to think that the girl of ten summers was already so like the woman who bore her: and his heart yearned for both, as his ears longed to be void of the ceaseless moan of the sea. His first joy was when he rode through the forest of Huelgoet, and heard no sound but the croodling of wild doves and the soft, sleepy purring of the south wind lapping the green leaves.

When he reached the Great Town, as Kempêr was then called, he saw black banners falling from the low walls of the Fort. He rode onward alone, and found Malgven lying on a high couch, with her golden diadem on her head, and her long hair clasped with golden rings, and her snow-white arms alongside her breastplate of curiously carven mail, which she wore above a white robe. Beside her sat the old blind King.

From that day Gradlon never smiled. For five years from that day he strove against the bitter hours, and in all unkingly ways, but without avail. He could not forget the beauty of Malgven. For one year he strove furiously in war. For a second year he hunted wild beasts, from forest to forest, from the domains of the north to the domains of the south and from the domains of the east to the domains of the west. For the third year he loved women by day, and cursed them through sleepless, remembering nights. For the fourth year he drank deep. For the fifth year the evil of his life was so great that men murmured against him, and many muttered: "Better the old blind King, Arz Dall, or the young sorceress Dahut herself."

During all these years Gradlon had no sight of Dahut. Because that she was her mother's self, and because that her beauty was so like, yet greater than that of Malgven, the King had sent her to Razmôr, his great fort in the north, where are the wildest seas and the wildest shores of Armorica. And in all these years Gradlon had but one joy, and that was when he mounted the great black stallion Morvark, and rode for hours, and for leagues upon leagues, by the falling surf of the seas. For when he rode the great horse, the sea beast as the Armoricans called it in their dread, he dreamed he heard voices he heard at no other time, and often, often, the long cry of Malgven that he had first listened to with shuddering awe among the Gaelic hills.

It was at the end of the fifth year that he came suddenly upon Dahut, when he was riding on Morvark by the wild coast of Razmôr. When his gaze drank in her great beauty, he reined in his furious stallion, and his heart beat, for it was surely Malgven come again, in immortal Dannite youth. Then, remembering that Morvark would let no mortal mount him, save only Gradlon and Malgven that was gone, he flung himself to the ground and lay there as though dead . . . whereat, with a loud neighing, terrible as the storm blast, Morvark raced with streaming mane towards Dahut. And when he was come to her, the girl laughed and held out her arms, and the black stallion whinnied with red nostrils against her cream white breasts, and his great eyes were like dark billows that have sunken rocks beneath them, and when he bent low his head and Dahut's ruddy hair streamed over her white shoulders, like blood falling over a white cliff, it was as though beneath this sunlit white cliff brooded the terror and mystery of nocturnal seas. Then Dahut mounted Morvark, and rode back towards the King, her father. As she rode, the moan of ocean broke across the sands. Waves lifted themselves out of windless calms, and made a hollow noise as of travelling thunders. On the unfurrowed, flowing plains, billows, like vast cattle with shaggy manes, rose and coursed hither and thither, with long, low, deliberate roar upon roar. Among the rocks and caverns a myriad waves relinquished clinging hands, only to spring forward again and seize the dripping rocks and swirl far inland long watery fingers so swift and fluent, yet with salt grip terrible and sure.

Gradlon looked at Dahut, and at the snorting stallion Morvark, and at the suddenly awakened and uplifted sea. "*Avel, avelon, holl avel!*" he cried:

"He found Malguen lying on a high couch . . . Beside her sat the old blind King"

"Wind, wind, all is but wind! vain as the wind, void as the wind!"

For he had seen that the woman, whose beauty was so great that his heart beat for fear of its strangeness, was no other than Dahut his daughter; and by that passing loveliness and that terrible beauty, and by the bending to her of the Tameless Morvark, and by the portents of the Sea

Her skin was white as new milk, as the breasts of doves; her hair was long and thick and wonderful, and of the hue of rowan-berries in sunlight, of bronze in firelight, of newly spilled blood trickling down a white cliff; her eyes were changeful as the sea, and, as the sea, were filled with unfathomable desires, and with shifting light full of terror and beauty.

"He knew that this was the daughter of Malgven."

which loved her, he knew that this was the daughter of Malgven, who was of the ancient and deathless children of Danû.

When Gradlon rode back to Kemper with Dahut before him upon Morvark, all who saw them fell on their knees. So great was the beauty of Dahut, and so strange was already the public rumour of the Sorceress, of this Daughter of the Sea.

But because Dahut could not live far from the wild seas she loved, she bade Gradlon make a new great town, and to build it by Razmôr, where the square-walled castle was, on the wave-swept promontory.

And thus was the Town of Ys built by Gradlon, Conan of Arvor, for the mystery and the delight and the wonder and the terror that was called Dahut the Red.

CONSTANCY.

BY BERTHA DEANE-FREEMAN.

THO' golden roses die beneath the sun,
I gather none
For what were bud and flow'r you cannot see,
Dearest, to me!

Tho' lark, near heaven, sing of joy untold,
My heart is cold . . .
For what, to me, were song that . . ah, my dear!
You cannot hear!

THE VALLEY OF WORDS.

BY FRANK RICHARDSON.

ILLUSTRATED BY A. WALLIS MILLS.

"It was 'Bully,' an American word"

ON the south side of Parnassus, illuminated fitfully when the clouds move from the mountain, is the VALLEY OF WOADS. Here are all sorts of WORDS — long WORDS, short WORDS, bad and good WORDS. They glide, shadow-like and slowly, up and down the valley. Every now and then, heedlessly, they stumble over the corpse of a dead WOAD, or the feeble form of a WORD dying of disuse.

At a slight distance, up one of the steep rocky sides, sits, wrapt in thought, the PARSIDENT OF WOADS. Year by year he is elected, and he is elected—for his popularity and for his merit.

Occasionally, a WORD that is lapsing through disuse climbs up the valley and looks over on the other sections. He looks at the strange, weird figures of the Chinese division, he looks longingly at the ungainly Germans, and he thinks that, perhaps, it will be well for him to step over and join them. Yet he knows that it is often death. He knows that only in the French section has an English WOAD now any possibility of life. Most of the WORDS are silent. Some pace indignantly to and fro, scarcely heeding the dead syllables on which they tread. They huddle together in indignant masses, and every now and then glance up at the PRESIDENT OF WOADS. But he remains silent. There is no help in him.

"It is absolutely extraordinary," says APOTHEGM. "Roosevelt has cut my G out. What shall I look like without my G?"

"A pedestrian," replied OYSTER, who, having no sense of humour, had a fondness for puns.

Public feeling was against him.

Very indignantly BURR spoke to OYSTER. "What's the good of *your* getting giddy about this, simply because *you've* been left out up to now? There is no earthly reason why the President shouldn't spell you OISTER. And then, how would you look? A Y in a word is like a buttonhole in a coat."

"You're quite right," said PIGMY. "I used to be a very dressy word. I used to have two Y's. My first Y has been altered."

Particularly indignant were AXE and ADZE.

AXE said that as AX he didn't look like anything at all. And he wept salt tears over ADZ.

"None of you chaps have suffered so much as I have," said HICCOUGH. "I now, if you please, am to be spelt HICCUP."

All agreed that President Roosevelt's decree was the greatest act of barbarism ever known.

"You see," said ARMOUR, in whom a tuck had been taken, "this man Roosevelt has such a barbarous name that he has no sense of the fitness of things. A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, and ROOSEVELT by any other name would spell a deuced sight better. Personally, I am sick of Roosevelt."

"Look at me!" cried NEIGHBOUR indignantly. "my U has been cut out. I feel as though I had had an operation for appendicitis, when I didn't need it."

The WOADS groaned in a grim chorus.

At that moment the sun pierced through the clouds, and they could see Chaucer and Shakespeare and Byron, those great men whom they had helped to make, and they held up their hands, beseeching succour. But the clouds once more rolled over Parnassus; and no help came.

Then spoke an old WOAD, a respected WOAD, a great WORD. Said he (and

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they all listened in silence as he spoke): "I am not a very long word. I have not even been a word at all so long as many of you. I cannot be traced back so far as a large number of my friends whom I see around me."

"Hear! hear!" cried many WORDS, who dated from the days of Chaucer, and who had helped the venerable Bede to make him what he is—whatever that may be. "Let us listen to WHISKER."

WHISKER continued: "It seems to me a cruel and barbarous thing that when a WORD has gone through so much trouble as a lot of you have that you should not be left alone. Some of you come from Rome, some from Athens, some from Arabia; some have even been adopted from Sanskrit. You have undergone such vast changes! You have been in peril of death during these changes. But you have now reached perfection."

Shouts of "Hear! hear!" "Guess so!"

"What's that?" roared WHISKER. "Who's speaking with that twang?"

All turned on the unfortunate speaker.

It was BULLY, an American WORD, a late importation into the VALLEY OF WORDS. When he and his companions CHEW GUM, HOMINY, CINCH had arrived, one by one, their appearance had not been resented by the kindly Old world WORDS. Only lately had they realised that they had among them an army of immigrants—upstarts who had helped, in no measure, to make the fame of Spenser, Shakespeare, Fielding, Alfred Austin or Hall Caine. RAGG had

"None of you chaps have suffered so much as I have," said Hiccough"

suggested a certain course. But RAGG was a parvenu, and spoke without weight. Besides, all WORDS, at some time, had been new-comers. Even PERISSODACTYL had had a lot of trouble, before he sprang into popularity on the Aeropolis. ORNITHORHYNCHUS recalled the fact that Adam had made three or four mistakes before hitting him off properly.

The WORDS, conscious of their humble beginnings, had, as a rule, been kind to new-comers.

But ORNITHORHYNCHUS feared for himself at the hands of Roosevelt, and

PERISSODACTYL felt there might be a bad time coming even for him.

As though by instinct, the Old world WORDS moved apart from the American importations. They spoke earnestly together. The American importations, trembling with a knowledge of approaching peril, made strange movements with their vowels, as though chewing tutti-frutti or pepsine gum. The WORDS with well-established reputations made a ring about them, and slowly, suggestively directed them to the foot of the rock on which sat the PRESIDENT of the WORDS.

The PRESIDENT of the WORDS raised his capital D. With flashing consonants he stared down at his people. Nothing had been said. But he felt that he knew; that he understood.

The WORDS, who had earned the right to be WORDS, had no fear of his sentence. They knew it would be just.

The WORDS, that had no right to be WORDS, felt also that his sentence would be just. They knew that, should he pronounce his own name, their doom would be sealed.

The PRESIDENT rose from his rock, and, with his vowel outstretched, spoke: "Oh, my people," said he, in a voice very terrible to hear, "I have but four letters to my name. It may well be that, in the fulness of time, Roosevelt may rob me of my final N."

* * * * *

Ere he had finished speaking, there was not an alien immigrant WORD alive in the VALLEY OF WORDS.

"The President . . . with his vowel outstretched spoke"

BY DESMOND COKE.

ILLUSTRATED BY W. RUSSELL FLINT.

THE Blue Lady wailed disconsolately in the panelled room.

In her mortal life, four hundred years before, she had always been somewhat behind the times, and now she was in arrears by the space of a whole Silly Season. She was grappling with the stale problem, "Do we Believe?"

The Blue Lady concluded, emphatically, that we did not believe; and hence her wailing. She had seen the age of scepticism coming. For more than three hundred glad years men had crossed themselves and shuddered when she went moaning through the sombre rooms of Yewcroft Hall. Secure in her reputation, she had been content once only in the evening to interrupt the revelry, and then, conscious that all eyes had been upon her stately progress, to seek contentedly her spectral couch. But with the growth of science had risen also disbelief. Once stage coaches were discarded, and people came to Yewcroft by a steam-drawn train, she felt that any other marvel must lose caste. She did not fail to observe that, as she passed along the rooms, there were those who, though they trembled, would not turn, and made pretence of not observing her. Then came the hideous day on which the Hall harboured a deputation from a Society of Research, who loaded themselves with cameras, dull books, and revolvers, before spending a night in the Panelled Room. The Blue Lady, as became a self-respecting ghost, slept elsewhere, and would not show herself to these ill-mannered creatures; so that next day the Press declared the famous Yewcroft ghost to be a myth. This was terrible; but far worse was to come.

The family who had held Yewcroft since feudal times, the Blue Lady's own family, showed with old age a preference for sleep, and inasmuch as an ungrateful populace refused to pay them for this function, reduced means led to the abandonment of Yewcroft. It was taken by Lord Silthirsk, who had made tinned meat and a million by methods equally ambiguous. He turned the moss-hung chapel into a garage, and fitted electric light throughout the Hall.

The Blue Lady, struck in every vulnerable part, resolved to drive the Silthirsks

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out. For the first three days of their residence she missed no chance of floating in on Lady Silthirsk at moments likely to embarrass her. Her Ladyship showed no symptoms of annoyance or of fear, though sometimes, if not alone, she would look up and say, "Oh, here's that blue one again," in tones which the blue one took to be of terror cleverly concealed. On the fourth day the Silthirsks had a niece to stay, and the Blue Lady embraced this as a chance to learn what real impression she had made. Waiting till dessert was on the table, so that her Ladyship might not think it necessary to hide her fear before the servants, she swept into the dining-room and passed close beside the niece.

Elfrida shuddered. "What was that?" she cried.

"What's what?" asked her aunt; while her uncle said "Banana," and fell to his dessert again.

"No—something cold: it made me shudder, just as if something had gone by."

The Blue Lady, ambushed behind a vast tooled leather screen, gloated over her success.

"Oh, *that*!" said Lady Silthirsk: "that's one of the fixtures—a spook. We rather like her—it's so picturesque and old world, ain't it? Some people can see her—*I* always can. She's blue—quite an inoffensive mauvy blue. Oh, I distinctly like her. She's a novelty, ye know, and she'll be *so* cooling in the summer!"

But even she started at the ghastly groan which issued from behind the leather screen.

For some weeks the Blue Lady did not deign to show herself, until Lady Silthirsk began to find fault. The landlord, she implied, had swindled her. It became clear to the spectre that all hopes of driving out these upstarts by terror had been idle dreams.

And now, on Christmas Eve, the night dedicate of old to her compatriots, she had given herself up to despair. She did not even care to walk. She wailed disconsolately in the Panelled Room.

It was thus that the Gaunt Baron found her. The Gaunt Baron did not belong to Yewcroft, but was attached to a neighbouring house, now empty. With nobody to terrify at home, he found visits to the Blue Lady a not unpiquing variant of the monotony. Except that she was several centuries his junior, he felt for her an emotion which went to a dangerous degree beyond respect. He was pained to find her wailing.

"What, wailing!" he cried, coming on her through the oaken panels, "and nobody to hear you?"

The Blue Lady raised a tortured face towards him. "Who would not wail? And who should hear me? Fools! They *can* not hear me. Many of them do not even see me. Bah! They have no sense, except the sense of taste, with truffles before them, they see nothing else."

"To-night is Christmas Eve."

The Gaunt Baron made the suggestion in a mild, kindly way, but the Blue Lady turned upon him almost angrily, as though he had been the culprit.

"Yes! To-night is Christmas Eve. And what are they doing? Where is the Yule-log? Where is the wassail? Where the dim light of glowing embers? They'll sit in the glare of this new light—a big party—and play what they call Bridge, and if they feel a mystic chill, will draw the curtains or turn the hot-air pipes full on . . . What do these fools know about Romance? The word is dead. I saw some of their novels while the house was shut. Love? Gallantry? Nowhere in the volume. A knock-kneed weakling making love to his friend's wife, or two infants puling of passion like mere vulgar serfs . . . Love, for these people, ends with Marriage, to begin again after Divorce."

"You are bitter." The Gaunt Baron held his head beneath his arm—a fact which gave to all his utterances something of the tone of a ventriloquist.

"Bitter! So would you be bitter! It's all very well for you, with the Manor empty,—but me, with these vulgarians! . . . Baron, these mortals are beating us: we're pretty well played out. 'Played out' Look at our very speech: they've ruined that. Do I speak like a woman of the day of Good Queen Bess? Do you speak like a baron of—of King—like an ancient baron?"

"You do not,—and it was Stephen," said the Baron quietly.

"Mark me, Baron, we are near the end. Either Lady Silthirsk or myself leaves Yewcroft. There is no room here for a self-respecting spectre. They use the headsman's block for mounting on

It was thus that the Count Baron found her

their horses If I cannot drive them out, I go,—and where? Well, if I cannot leave the earth—oh, why was I ever murdered?—then I must sleep beneath the hedges, till I find an empty house. Baron, that time is near. I have tried everything, and nothing seems to frighten them. Lady Silthirsk serves liqueurs in the old Banquet Hall at midnight, and as I don't appear,—as though I should!—she says the theatre is closed for alterations and repairs. Oh, it is unbearable, unbearable!"

"Dear lady," answered the Gaunt Baron, "do not despair. I managed to say, some minutes ago, that it was Christmas Eve Let me explain. It is now close upon the hour of midnight—the time and day on which we ghosts are thought by men to have our greatest power. Even those who don't believe in us are a little influenced by the tradition. As twelve strikes every one is half expectant. That is your moment. Burst upon them, wailing and raving They are sure to see. Some of the guests will insist on leaving Yewcroft, and the Silthirsks will not like a house where parties are impossible. Quick! There is the gurgle that preludes the hall-clock's striking. In three minutes midnight will be here Hasten, sweet dame, hasten! I will be at hand to watch you."

* * * * *

Downstairs, during this dialogue, Lady Silthirsk had been talking to her niece. "Elfrida, dear, in a few minutes they'll all be here for the midnight *séance*; and I have something that I want to tell you first."

"Why, what is it, auntie?" asked Elfrida: "you look terribly serious."

"I am serious, darling girl. Let me be frank. I think it is time that you were married—not only, understand, because of your poor parents, but also for your own happiness. And when I see a man who can make you both rich and happy, well——"

"But who?" interrupted Elfrida.

"*Who?* My dear girl, are you blind? Why, Bobby!"

"Lord Bancourt?"

"Yes, 'Lord Bancourt'! Don't look as though I had shot you! Why, you silly dear thing, you must know Bobby is madly in love with you All this week he has followed you about like an obedient dog, and all the week you've ignored him as though he were a naughty mongrel!"

"Why, I'm sure I've treated him just like anybody else. I never——"

"My dear Elfrida, you will be the death of me! Do you think he wants no more of you? Are you living in the Middle Ages, or is this the Twencentury? Do you expect him to come and steal you away by night and force? Nowadays the girl must do her part. Bobby is a splendid fellow, an old friend of mine, rich, young, passably good-looking——"

"I think he's handsome, decidedly," Elfrida said, without a thought, and then blushed scarlet.

Her aunt laughed. "And *I* think you're in love with him," she said "I know he only wants a little encouragement—not quite so much ice to the square inch, my dear! Won't you try, for my sake?"

"I'll try, auntie, yes· I could be very, very happy with him—if he asked me but I don't think I could—it's so hard——"

Lady Silthirsk kissed her. "I don't ask anything, you little goose, except that you should be just humanly kind to poor Bobby—I think he'll do the rest!"

"I'll *try*," said Elfrida dubiously.

Her aunt, she reflected, was not of a nature to see how terrible it would be if people should believe her to be "angling" for Lord Bancourt. Better that he should choose some one else than that he should marry her on such a rumour!

"Oh, here they are!" cried Lady Silthirsk, as her husband brought his flock into the room, shouting:

"I've collected every one, gamblers and all, for the *séance*—except Bobby. Can't find him."

"Oh. I wish he were here—the Lady will surely walk on Christmas Eve," said the hostess "If she doesn't, I mean to demand my money back! Oh, there's the hour! Sit quiet, every one . . Blue Lady forward, please! There, look!—there!"

She pointed excitedly at the old gallery, once for minstrels, now arrogated by a pianola organ Behind its oaken pillars passed a vague female figure, dressed in blue, moaning horribly, and waving distraught arms above her flowing hair

Immediately cries of every sort rose from the watchers.

"I can't see her." "It's a cinemato-

graph!" "What ho, Lord Bobby!" "Gad, she's gone slick through the music-stool." "I still can't see her." "No, there's nothing there." "Do a cakewalk, now!" "Encore!"

"'Nowadays the girl must do her part. Bobby is a splendid fellow.'"

As she vanished some one clapped his hands, and with a laugh the whole party joined in the applause.

The scene had not been very impressive. From a theatrical point of view the ghost's entrance had been ruined by the number and the temper of its audience. Those who had not seen it scoffed, those who had, till reminded of the music-stool seen dimly through the figure, half-believed the Blue Lady to be an *alias* of Lord Bancourt. Then, as one by one they realised that what had passed was in very truth a ghost, the guests hushed their laughter, until the babel sank almost into silence.

It was in such a lull that Bobby entered. "Why, what a stony *séance*!" he exclaimed. "Missing me? or seen a ghost?"

"Yes—so delightful! The Blue Lady actually came," said Lady Silthrusk, who alone seemed totally unruffled.

Bobby laughed, the unforced laugh of healthy youth. "Oh—ho! I see why you were silent. But you can't green me, thanks. I'm not quite so verdant—oh no, not at all!"

"We have seen it—really," one or two guests hastened to assure him.

Lord Bancourt laughed more heartily than ever. "Why, I believe you've honestly deceived yourselves! This is glorious! You really think you saw the ghost!"

"Who could doubt?" asked a plump dowager, who intended henceforth to adopt a pose intensely spiritual. "What doubt exists, when the great After lifts its veil? Have *you* ever seen a ghost, Lord Bancourt?"

Bobby tried to hide his smiles. "I'm afraid—and glad—I haven't. If I did, I should go off my nut, I think. But I don't think I ever shall!"

With these words he moved towards the circle of ghost-seers, and chose, with unerring aim, of all the vacant chairs, that next Elfrida.

Lady Silthirsk beamed contentedly.

"I seem to have missed a lot," said the irrepressible Bobby, as he sat down, and added impudently, "but I hope that I've been missed a lot?"

Elfrida remembered her aunt's warning, but she also fancied (as the self-conscious will) that all the gathering, still somewhat silent, had heard the question, and would hear the answer. She could fancy their scorn at her "scheming tactics."

Bobby looked expectantly towards her.

"It was certainly a unique experience," she said stiffly.

Bobby's face fell.

Lady Silthirsk shrugged her shoulders.

* * * * *

"There!" exclaimed the Blue Lady, safe within the Panelled Room, "I knew how your mad scheme would work. You heard: they catcalled, they encored me, asked for some new dance. They gave me a round of applause when I went off. I can stay here no longer, to be insulted.'

"Always impetuous'" said the Gaunt Baron quietly. "You rushed off after the applause. I waited, and heard what alters the whole question."

"Surely——?" asked the Lady, in ill temper.

"Lord Bancourt did not see you—has never seen a ghost—doesn't believe in them. He said distinctly, 'If I saw one, I should go off my nut,'—this being schoolboy and smart for going mad."

"I begin to see." The Blue Lady brightened visibly.

"Exactly. You must catch him alone—no more of these convivial audiences—and then drive him mad. He is an old friend of Lady Silthirsk, rich and titled—she would not stay here after that. You must wreak your worst on him."

"I can only wail," she answered gloomily; "I have no chains, or blood, or severed head——"

The words inspired the headless Baron.

"Ah," he cried, "I will come and help—to-night. I ought not to show myself out of my own house, but——"

"Oh, what is etiquette in such a crisis? Baron, dear Baron, you have saved me. I am an old-fashioned woman, and at such a time I need a man . . ."

* * * * *

It was night. It had, to be precise, been night for several hours, and the whole household was at length tucked up in bed. Sleep had come none too easily to at least three members,—to Elfrida worrying about the real sentiments of Bobby, to Bobby worrying about the real sentiments of Elfrida, and to Lady Silthirsk worrying about the real sentiments of both. The last named, in particular, tossed long upon her sleepless bed. She was puzzled. She could half understand Elfrida's foolish diffidence: she could not understand Bobby's idiotic silence. Why did he not speak? He was not of a sort to be lightly daunted by the fear of a rebuff. Or had she made a false diagnosis? Was he not in love at all?

And at length even she turned over on her side with a contented groan. Sleep reigned over Yeweroft Hall.

But in Bobby's room, far off along the west wing, dark deeds were decidedly afoot. For more than half an hour a headless Knight, clanking horribly in every joint of his dim-gleaming armour, had chased to and fro a blue-clad Lady, who wailed in awful wise and tossed arms of agony to the wall-papered ceiling.

Through all this Lord Bancourt slept smilingly upon his noble bed.

Then the Gaunt Baron consulted with the Blue Lady, and a change of tactics

"In Bubby's room far off along the west wing dark deeds were decidedly afoot"

was the result. The armoured figure now rattled round the room, rousing more noise than any antiquated motor, the while a frantic dame pursued him with blood-curdling wails

Bobby stirred a little, murmured sleepily, turned over, and showed every symptom of having relapsed into even deeper slumber.

The ghosts were in despair.

"Dawn draws on," said the Gaunt Baron suddenly. "I always knew when I was beaten. Come, sweet dame. A man who can sleep like that will make his mark some day in the House of Lords"

He vanished, and, after one despairing glance, the Blue Lady flung herself angrily through the oaken door.

It was at this moment, by a subtle irony of fate, that Lord Bancourt awoke The sense of some presence lingered with him, and he sat upright in bed. His sleepy eyes were caught by a blue skirt which vanished from the doorway; his sleepy mind failed to perceive that the door had not been open.

"Whew!" he said, and lay thinking, thinking deeply—for Lord Bancourt.

He was very young, and, like most young nobles, not inclined to underestimate his own importance. After the first moment of surprise, he felt no doubt as to the wearer of the blue skirt. It was Elfrida. He was rather unobservant as to women's dresses "and all that, you know": but felt fairly certain that she had worn a blue costume at dinner Yes, it could be no one else. It was almost certainly Elfrida.

Elfrida's iciness was but a cloak. When she had snubbed him by day, she would creep in by night and gaze upon his sleeping, moonlit face! How beautiful!

His heart thrilled at the revelation. He had hesitated, so far, to speak. It would never do for him—Lord Bancourt—to risk refusal by a nobody. His mother, in her long course of tuition, had taught him proper pride But now . . .

Now, at the first chance, he would throw himself, his rank, his wealth, his everything before the nobody, and feel no fear as to the verdict To-morrow—to morrow!

And when to morrow came, as it does sometimes come despite the proverb, he rose early and went out in the garden As he had shaved each morning, he had seen Elfrida walking in the grounds below. He had never dared to join her. Everything, to-day, was different, though the weather was certainly absurdly cold for early rising.

She was there before him, in among the white, hoar-laden, yew walks. She turned at his coming "You are early this morning, Lord Bancourt."

"Ah," he responded meaningly, "the early bird catches the first worm." It struck him, for the moment, as a compliment, and rather neat. But he pined for something less indefinite. "Elfrida," he said, going close to her, "I may call you Elfrida?—I could not wait. You encouraged me last night, you gave me hope, and now—I want more. You won't take even that away? I want far more. I want you—I want you to be my wife Will you, Elfrida? Don't be cruel. I want you to say 'yes'!"

Elfrida's head was in a whirl. She did not know how she had encouraged him She could remember nothing of last night, except that she had lost a chance—that he had seemed offended. She could not guess at what had changed his attitude She only knew that what her aunt wanted—above all, what she herself longed for—had somehow come to pass; only knew that her loved one's arms were round her. She said "Yes."

* * * * *

"Sweet dame," said the Gaunt Baron, later, in the Panelled Room, "I have been scouting, and, alas! bring evil news. Lord Bancourt took you last night for Elfrida, was encouraged to propose, and is accepted. Lady Silthirsk is delighted, says the wedding shall be here, and she must turn this dear chamber into a dressing-room. She says she will clear out the musty panelling. It is all unfortunate."

"Unfortunate!" wailed the Blue Lady. "It all comes of listening to a man. See what your mad scheme has done! . . . . Baron, forgive my bitterness,—I am defeated. I told you these mortals had vanquished us I set out to do a little evil, in the good old way, and see what I have done? I have made everybody happy! Farewell Yewcroft must know me no more. Farewell, farewell for ever!"

With an abysmal groan she vanished through the panelling Unless she has found an ancient, empty house, she is perhaps sleeping underneath the hedges.

THE BUS CONDUCTOR.

BY E. F. BENSON.

ILLUSTRATED BY A. WALLIS MILLS.

MY friend Hugh Grainger and I had just returned from a Christmas visit in the country, where we had been staying in a house of sinister repute, which was supposed to be haunted by ghosts of a peculiarly fearsome and truculent sort. The house itself was all that such a house should be. Jacobean and oak-panelled, with long dark passages and high vaulted rooms. It stood, also, very remote, and was encompassed by a wood of sombre pines; and all the time that we were there a south-westerly gale with torrents of scolding rain had prevailed, so that by day and night weird voices moaned and fluted in the chimneys, a company of uneasy spirits held colloquy among the trees, and sudden tattoes and tappings beckoned from the window-panes. But in spite of these surroundings, which were sufficient in themselves, one would almost say, to spontaneously generate occult phenomena, nothing of any description had occurred. I am bound to add, also, that my own state of mind was peculiarly well adapted to receive or even to invent the sights and sounds we had gone to seek, for I was, I confess, during the whole time that we were there, in a state of abject apprehension, and lay awake every night through hours of terrified unrest, afraid of the dark, yet more afraid of what a lighted candle might show me. The light-hearted family, finally, with whom we stayed insisted on telling ghost-stories in the evening, to "encourage" the ghosts, so they said, and give a more Christmas feel to the wet and windy weather.

Hugh Grainger on the evening after our return had dined with me, and after dinner our conversation, as was natural, soon came back to these entrancing topics.

"But why you go ghost-seeking I cannot imagine," he said, "because your teeth were chattering and your eyes starting out of your head all the time you were there, from sheer fright. Or do you like being frightened?"

Hugh, though generally intelligent, is dense in certain ways: this is one of them

"Why, of course I like being frightened," I said. "I want to be made to creep and creep and creep. Fear is the most absorbing and luxurious of emotions. One forgets all else if one is afraid."

"Well, the fact that neither of us saw anything," he said, "confirms what I have always believed."

"And what have you always believed?"

"That these phenomena are purely objective, not subjective, and that one's state of mind has nothing to do with the perception that perceives them, nor have circumstances or surroundings anything to do with them either. Look at Osburton! It has had the reputation of being a haunted house for years, and it certainly has all the accessories of one. Look at yourself, too, with all your nerves on edge, afraid to look round or light a candle for fear of seeing something! Surely there was the right man in the right place then, if ghosts are subjective."

He got up and lit a cigarette; and looking at him—Hugh is about six feet high, and as broad as he is long—I felt a retort on my lips, for I could not help my mind going back to a certain period in his life when, from some cause which, as far as I knew, he had never told anybody, he had become a mere quivering mass of disordered nerves. Oddly enough, at the same moment and for the first time he began to speak of it himself

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"You may reply that it was not worth my while to go either," he said, "because I was so clearly the wrong man in the wrong place. But I wasn't. You for all your apprehensions and expectancy have never seen a ghost. But I have, though I am the last person in the world you would have thought likely to do so, and, though my nerves are steady enough again now, it knocked me all to bits."

He sat down again in his chair.

"No doubt you remember my going to bits," he said, "and since I believe that I am sound again now, I should rather like to tell you about it. But before, I couldn't. I couldn't speak of it at all to anybody. Yet there ought to have been nothing frightening about it: what I saw was certainly a most useful and friendly ghost. But it came from the shaded side of things: it looked suddenly out of the night and the mystery with which life is surrounded.

"I want first to tell you quite shortly my theory about ghost-seeing," he continued, "and I can explain it best by a simile, an image. Imagine, then, that you and I and everybody in the world are like a person whose eye is directly opposite a little tiny hole in a sheet of cardboard,

"'You for all your apprehensions and expectancy have never seen a ghost.'"

which is continually shifting and revolving and moving about. Back to back with that sheet of cardboard is another, which also, by laws of its own, is in perpetual but independent motion. In it, too, there is another hole; and when, fortuitously it would seem, these two holes, the one through which we are always looking, and the other in the spiritual plane, come opposite one another, we see through, and then only do the sights and sounds of the spiritual world become visible or audible to us. With most people those holes never come opposite each other during their life. But at the hour of death they do, and then they remain stationary. That, I fancy, is how we 'pass over.'

"Now in some natures these holes are comparatively large, and are constantly coming into opposition. Clairvoyants, mediums, are like that. But, as far as I knew, I had no clairvoyant or mediumistic powers at all. I therefore am the

sort of person who long ago made up his mind that he never would see a ghost. It was, so to speak, an incalculable chance that my minute spy hole should come into opposition with the other. But it did; and it knocked me out of time."

I had heard some such theory before, and though Hugh put it rather picturesquely, there was nothing in the least convincing or practical about it. It might be so, or again it might not.

"I hope your ghost was more original than your theory," said I, in order to bring him to the point.

"Yes, I think it was. You shall judge."

I put on more coal and poked up the fire. Hugh has got, so I have always considered, a great talent for telling stories, and that sense of drama which is so necessary for the narrator. Indeed, before now I have suggested to him that he should take this up as a profession, sit by the fountain in Piccadilly Circus when times are, as usual, bad, and tell stories to the passers by in the street, Arabian fashion, for reward. The most part of mankind, I am aware, do not like long stories; but to the few, among whom I number myself, who really like to listen to lengthy accounts of experiences, Hugh is an ideal narrator. I do not care for his theories, or for his similes, but when it comes to facts, to things that happened, I like him to be lengthy.

"Go on, please, and slowly," I said. "Brevity may be the soul of wit, but it is the ruin of story-telling. I want to hear when and where and how it all was, and what you had had for lunch and where you had dined, and what——"

Hugh began.

"It was the 24th of June, just eighteen months ago," he said. "I had let my flat, you may remember, and came up from the country to stay with you for a week. We had dined alone here——"

I could not help interrupting.

"Did you see the ghost here?" I asked. "In this square little box of a house in a modern street?"

"I was in the house when I saw it."

I hugged myself in silence.

"We had dined alone here in Oakley Street," he said, "and after dinner I went out to some party, and you refused to go and stopped at home. At dinner your man did not wait, and when I asked where he was, you told me he was ill, and, I thought, changed the subject rather abruptly. You gave me your latchkey when I went out, and on coming back I found you had gone to bed. There were, however, several letters for me, which required answers. I wrote them there and then, and posted them at the pillar-box opposite. So I suppose it was rather late when I went upstairs."

"You had put me in the front room on the third floor, overlooking the street—a room which I thought you generally occupied yourself. It was a very hot night, and though there had been a moon when I started to my party, on my return the whole sky was cloud-covered, and it both looked and felt as if we might have a thunderstorm before morning. I was

"'Just room for one inside, sir,' he said

feeling very sleepy and heavy, and it was not till after I had got into bed that I noticed by the shadows of the window-frames on the blind that only one of the windows was open. But it did not seem worth while to get out of bed in order to open the other, though I felt rather airless and uncomfortable; and I went to sleep.

"What time it was when I awoke I do not know, but it was certainly not yet dawn, and I never remember being conscious of such an extraordinary stillness as prevailed. There was no sound either of foot-passengers or wheeled traffic; the music of life appeared to be absolutely mute. But now, instead of being sleepy and heavy, I felt—though I must have slept an hour or two at most, since it was not yet dawn—perfectly fresh and wide-awake, and the effort which had seemed not worth making before, that of getting out of bed and opening the other window, was quite easy now, so I pulled up the blind, threw the window wide open, and leaned out, for somehow I parched and pined for air. Even outside the oppression was intolerable, and though, as you know, I am not easily given to feel the mental effects of climate, I was aware of an incommunicable dread coming over me. I tried to analyse it away, but without success: the past day had been pleasant, I looked forward to another pleasant day to-morrow, and yet I was full of some nameless apprehension. I felt, too, dreadfully lonely in this stillness before the dawn.

"Then I heard suddenly, and not very far away, the sound of some approaching vehicle: I could distinguish the tread of two horses walking at a slow foot's pace. They were, though yet invisible, coming up the street, and yet this indication of life did not abate that dreadful sense of loneliness which I have spoken of. Also in some dim unformulated way that which was coming seemed to me to have something to do with the cause of my oppression.

"Then the vehicle came into sight. At first I could not distinguish what it was. Then I saw that the horses were black and had long tails, and that what they dragged was made of glass, but had a black frame. It was a hearse. Empty.

"It was moving up this side of the street. It stopped at your door.

"Then the obvious solution struck me. You had said at dinner that your man, who waited on us to-night, was ill, and you were, I thought, unwilling to speak more about his illness. No doubt, so I imagined now, he was dead, and for some reason, perhaps because you did not want me to know anything about it, or feel uncomfortable, you were having the body removed at night. This, I must tell you, passed through my mind quite instantaneously, and it did not occur to me how unlikely it really was, before the next thing happened.

"I was still leaning out of the window, and I remember also wondering, yet only momentarily, how odd it was that I saw things—or rather the one thing I was looking at—so very distinctly. Of course there was a moon behind the clouds, but it was curious how every detail of the hearse and the horses was visible. There was only one man, the driver, with it, and the street was otherwise absolutely empty. It was at him I was looking now. I could see every detail of his clothes, but from where I was, so high above him, I could not see his face. He had on grey trousers, brown boots, a black coat buttoned all the way up, and a straw hat. Over his shoulder there was a strap, which seemed to support some sort of little bag. He looked exactly like——well, from my description what did he look exactly like?"

"Why, a bus-conductor," I said instantly.

"So I thought, and even while I was thinking this, he looked up at me. He had a rather long thin face, and on his left cheek there was a mole with a growth of dark hair on it. All this was as distinct as if it had been noonday, and as if I was within a yard of him. But—so instantaneous was all that takes so long in the telling—I had not time to think it strange that the driver of a hearse should be so unfunereally dressed.

'Then he touched his hat to me, and jerked his thumb over his shoulder. 'Just room for one inside, sir,' he said.

'There was something so odious, so coarse, so unfeeling about this, that I instantly drew my head in, pulled the blind down again, and then, for what reason I do not know, turned on the electric light in order to see what time it was. The hands of my watch pointed to half past eleven.

"It was then for the first time, I think, that the doubt crossed my mind as to the

nature of what I had just seen. But I put out the light again, got into bed, and began to think. We had dined; I had gone to a party, I had come back and written letters, had gone to bed and had slept. So how could it be half-past eleven? . . . Or—*what* half-past eleven was it?

"Then another easy solution struck me: my watch must have stopped. But it had not—I could hear it ticking.

"There was stillness and silence again. I expected every moment to hear muffled footsteps on the stairs, footsteps moving slowly and smally under the weight of a heavy burden; but from inside the house there was no sound whatever. Outside, too, there was the same dead silence, while the hearse waited at the door. And the minutes ticked on and ticked on, and at length I saw a difference in the light in the room, and knew that the dawn was beginning to break outside. But how had it happened, then, that if the corpse was to be removed at night it had not gone, and that the hearse still waited, when morning was already coming?

"Presently I got out of bed again, and with a sense of strong physical shrinking I went to the window and pulled back the blind. The dawn was coming fast: the whole street was lit by that silver hueless light of morning. But there was no hearse there.

"And then I told myself that the whole thing had been a dream. But if you ask me whether I believed what I told myself, I must confess that I did not.

"Your man did not appear at breakfast next morning, nor did I see him again before I left that afternoon. I think, if I had, I should have told you about all this, but it was still possible, you see, that what I had seen was a real hearse, driven by a real driver, for all the ghastly gaiety of the face that had looked up to mine, and the levity of his pointing hand. I might possibly have fallen asleep soon after seeing him, and slumbered through the removal of the body and the departure of the hearse. So I did not speak of it to you."

There was something wonderfully straightforward and prosaic in all this: here were no Jacobean houses oak-panelled and surrounded by weeping pine-trees, and somehow the very absence of suitable surroundings made the story more impressive. But for a moment a doubt assailed me.

"I expected every moment to hear muffled footsteps on the stairs."

"Don't tell me it was all a dream," I said.

"I don't know whether it was or not. I can only say that I believe myself to have been wide awake. In any case, the rest of the story is—odd.

"I went out of town again that afternoon," he continued, "and I may say that I don't think that even for a moment did I get the haunting sense of what I had seen or dreamed that night out of my mind. It was present to me always, as some vision unfulfilled. It was as if some clock had struck the four quarters, and I was still waiting to hear what the hour would be.

"Exactly a month afterwards I was in London again, but only for the day. I arrived at Victoria about eleven, and took the underground to Sloane Square in order to see if you were in town and would give me lunch. It was a baking hot morning, and I intended to take a bus from Sloane Square as far as Oakley

Street. There was one standing at the corner just as I came out of the station; but I saw that the top was full, and the inside appeared to be full also. Just as I came up to it, the conductor, who, I suppose, had been inside, collecting fares or what not, came out on to the step within a few feet of me. He wore grey trousers, brown boots, a black coat buttoned, a straw hat, and over his shoulder was a strap, on which hung his little machine for punching tickets. I saw his face, too: it was the face of the driver of the hearse, with a mole on the left cheek. Then he spoke to me, jerking his thumb over his shoulder: 'Just room for one inside, sir,' he said.

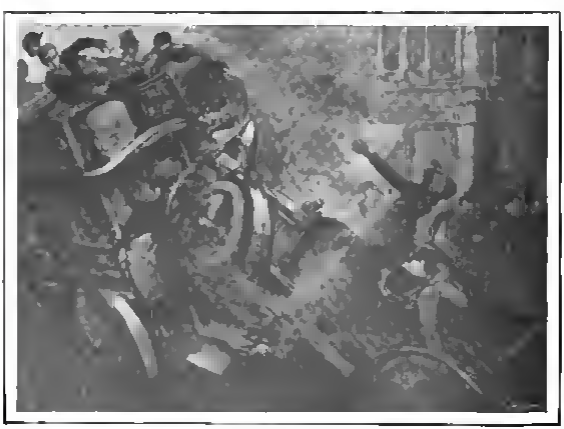
"At that a sort of panic terror took possession of me, and I know I gesticulated wildly with my arms, and cried 'No, no!' But at that moment I was living not in the hour that was then passing, but in that hour which had passed a month ago, when I leaned from the window of your bedroom here just before the dawn broke. At this moment, too, I knew that my spy-hole had been opposite the spy-hole into the spiritual world. What I had seen there had some significance, now being fulfilled, beyond the significance of the trivial happenings of to-day and to-morrow. The Powers of which we know so little were visibly working before me. And I stood there on the pavement shaking and trembling.

"I was opposite the post-office at the corner, and just as the bus started my eye fell on the clock in the window there. And I knew then *what* half-past eleven it had been which was recorded by my watch on that 24th of June. It was the half-past eleven that was passing at this moment.

"Perhaps I need not tell you the rest, for you probably conjecture it, since you will not have forgotten what happened at the corner of Sloane Square at the end of July the summer before last. Instantly the bus pulled out from the pavement into the street in order to get round a van that was standing in front of it. At that moment there came down the King's Road a big motor going at a hideously dangerous pace. It crashed full into the bus, burrowing into it as a gimlet burrows into a board, making matchwood and—other things of it."

He paused.

"And that's my story," he said.



"*It crashed full into the bus.*"

THE DREAM HOUSE.

BY THE HON. MARY CAVENDISH

ILLUSTRATED BY ARTHUR H BUCKLAND.

THERE were a good many of us gathered together in the smoking room. It was the hour of tea and gossip, and then some one suggested that the electric lights should be turned off and that we should tell ghost stories.

So we gathered round the fire—host, hostess, and the Christmas party—and the supernatural held sway. There were some good stories told, I remember; some of the girls began to look nervously over their shoulders, and to think of the long passage to be presently traversed to their rooms.

Then the tired looking little woman in grey, sitting back in the corner, spoke. She had a pleasant, sad face, and was a distant cousin of our host's. Some one had mentioned dreams, rather scoffing at any belief in them.

"I myself know of a very strange dream experience," she said, rather diffidently.

We all pressed her to tell it. It did not seem very easy for her to begin. She had a very low, gentle voice.

"It was a friend of mine, and her mother. They lived alone in a dreary little house in a country town. It is long ago."

She stopped, as if to be questioned, but no one spoke.

"They were the only two left of a large family. The father, a clergyman, was dead, and the sons married or abroad. There were no other daughters, the mother was very dependent on the girl, being more or less of an invalid. They were very poor."

"'I myself know of a very strange dream experience.'"

One of the girls of the party interrupted: "What was your friend's name?" she asked.

The little woman in grey gazed into the fire before answering. She seemed to be seeing people and things we could not.

"Marian," she said presently.

Some one's chair creaked noisily. It was the tall man's,

with the sunburnt face, who had lately come back from Australia. He had only arrived last night, and we none of us knew him. But I rather liked his face.

"'Ellen,' she said to me suddenly, 'I am going to tell you something strange.'"

She, the story teller, went on, in her quiet, even tones:

"Though they were so dependent on each other, I don't think that those two were so *drawn together* as many mothers and daughters are. I don't mean," she added quickly, "that they were not very fond of each other, but there was none of that perfectly open affection that so often exists between two lonely people. No one could have been a better daughter than Marian. Perhaps she was a little cold, a little undemonstrative. I think they did not really understand one another.

"They were poor, but very proud. The mother insisted on keeping a little maid to do the rough work, and spare Marian's hands. She had such white hands, had Marian. But they were terribly hampered. Presently Marian took to making blouses and things for a shop in the town, but she did not tell her mother; she would say she was making something for herself. But it was something she never wore. And her mother asked no questions. Perhaps she guessed.

"I used often to go to their tiny house. My father was vicar of the parish, and we would sometimes ask them to dinner or tea. But they seldom came. I think they were too proud for one-sided hospitality."

She paused a moment, and again looked into the fire. I, too, seemed to see the girl making the blouses she never wore, and the mother who asked no questions. The gentle voice went on:

"And now the dream part comes. I went, one June afternoon, to fetch Marian for a walk. We went—I remember it so well—out of the town into the woods above. I can see her now. She had very pretty pale gold hair; people called her colourless, but I thought her lovely. She was wearing a pink cotton dress, and had pinned a pink rose into the front of it. We sat down in the woods.

"'Ellen,' she said to me, suddenly,

'I am going to tell you something strange. I have had a dream, the same dream, for a fortnight, not every night, but at intervals of two or three days.'

"And then she told it me. She dreamed she was in a house she had never been in before, a large, spacious house with big rooms and a huge staircase. It was luxuriously furnished, but it was empty. Appallingly empty, Marian said; and she always found herself, in her dream, in the hall, and then she would start searching the house, up and down, always seeking for some one. It was not an aimless search, but a definite seeking for some *one* person, but *whom* she did not know. And this had happened many times, and the intense loneliness of the house was beginning to frighten her."

Some coals dropped noisily into the grate, and one of the younger girls shivered involuntarily. The big man in the wicker-chair again moved in it noisily.

"Marian was, I could see, getting really nervous, so I made light of the whole thing; but, during the next few days, when I did not see her, I often thought of that strange dream-house of hers. And then she wrote, asking me to go to tea that day. It was a very hurried note, with a word misspelt in it. I had never known Marian to spell wrongly before. So I went. I found Marian at work on a wonderful lace blouse, with some delicate mauve ribbons on it. I could not help thinking how well it would have become herself. She did not put her work away when I came in, but sewed on busily, a bright spot of colour in each cheek. It was not until after tea that they told me. Then Marian spoke:

"'You remember,' she said, still sewing busily, 'my dream I told you of?'

"'Yes,' I said, rather wondering to hear her mention it before her mother.

"'Well,' went on Marian, her eyes beginning to have rather a distressful look, 'I can not understand it. For mother has that dream too.'"

Some one drew in their breath sharply, but the little woman in grey did not pause.

"It seemed that Marian's mother had had the same dream as her daughter in every respect. The empty, well-furnished house, the perpetual seeking for some one, and the appalling feeling of loneliness. She had told Marian for the same reason that the girl had told me, the want of a friend to sympathise—to *explain*. And *this* I could not do. I looked at Marian's mother, a little querulous woman, with faded hair—Marian's would be like it some day. She was looking at me rather curiously. "We have had the same dream on the same nights," she said, clasping one hand over the other nervously. She wore some very fine rings, which no poverty would have induced her to part with. "We are both in the same house, seeking for some one, and we cannot find them."

One of the girls spoke suddenly. "'But I don't see,'" she objected, "'why

"'Has it ever occurred to you who it is you are seeking in your Dream House?'

they were both so frightened. It was just an empty house." But she did not speak convincingly.

The older woman shook her head. "But that is just what it was not," she answered, in those gentle, insistent tones—"just an empty house. That might have been lonely, but not necessarily frightening. It was the feeling that they were not exactly alone, but that some invisible person was eluding them, that gave them that undefinable fear."

The girl did not answer; she was sitting on a footstool at my feet, and crept a little closer.

"I suppose some people would have argued with Marian and her mother that dreams were all nonsense, but they have never seemed so to me. We talked it over. Each wrote down, at my suggestion, an exact description of their 'Dream House' in every detail; and each talked, to the very subjects of the pictures on the walls. I have the descriptions now. Then, by my advice,—and they seemed to lean on what I said,—we spoke of it no more. I could see they were both nervous, and was glad to think that in a few days they would be going away for their little annual holiday.

"I did not see them again for three weeks. Then I heard that they had returned, and went round to the house. Both looked marvellously better. Marian's cheeks had a little colour in them. Nothing was said about the dream; I hoped they had forgotten. But I thought they seemed *more* to each other, more drawn together than formerly."

Again a little pause. I wished the man in the wicker chair had chosen a less noisy seat; he seemed such a restless person.

"I wondered why Marian looked so happy, and put it down to the change. But the next day she told me. She had met a man at the little seaside place where they had been staying, and had become engaged to him. He was the friend of a friend of theirs. And he was coming to-morrow, to stay. It would have been heartless to have said anything to damp Marian's joy, but my father agreed with me, when I went home, that it seemed a little hurried. But when he came we all liked him, and he seemed devoted to Marian. He was an engineer, and had business up in the North. Nothing was said as to the date of their marriage. I asked Marian once, but she said hurriedly, 'Oh, nothing is settled yet!' so I said no more. And after ten days he went away. Marian settled down again to her blouses, still with that wonderful look of hope on her face. I prayed that it might last. She had long letters from him. And two months went by."

"What was the man's name?" I asked. I do not know what prompted me, and I felt sorry directly the words were said: they seemed, somehow, an impertinence.

She did not answer for a moment. "Henry was his name," she said; "Marian called him Harry, but Henry was his name. He was a good-looking man, with an odd scar on his right cheek. It came from an accident in the engine works.

"And presently the dreams began again, and Marian and her mother began to have that startled look which people get when they fear something, but do not quite know what.

"One day a sudden thought came to me. They had come to the vicarage to tea, on one of their rare visits. We were alone in the drawing-room. 'Marian,' I said, 'has it ever occurred to you who it is you are seeking in your Dream House?'

"She turned her eyes upon me; they had a puzzled, sad look. I wondered if she was worried over—other things. She had said nothing to me.

"'No,' she answered, listlessly; 'at least, I *have* thought, but I have no clue.'

"'I believe,' I said, as earnestly as I could, 'that in *your* Dream House, Marian, you are looking for your mother, and she, in hers, for you.'

"It was odd how this view seemed instantly to comfort them. We talked on awhile, and then they said they must go.

"'I don't mind, now that I feel that I am only looking for Marian,' said her mother. She looked at her lovingly.

"They waved to me as I stood at the gate watching them down the road. The sun, which brought out the colour on Marian's pale hair, showed how rusty was the black of her mother's mantle. But it had been a smart garment once.

"I asked Marian a few days later if she still dreamed the dream.

"'Oh yes,' she said. 'I never expect to do anything else now. And you are right, Ellen: it *is* mother I am seeking in that house. I seem to know it now.'

"I had learnt by this time the useless-

ness of trying to talk of the Dream House as unreal. For it existed And so I said gently, 'You will meet in the Dream House some day, Marian'

"I cannot forget the look of pain and horror that came over her face. 'Oh, don't say that!' she said earnestly.

"And I found that she believed, and day for a couple of nights He had heard the story of the dream, and I would ask him to reason Marian out of her fears. But he came and left, and I did not see him Only Marian, wild eyed and haggard, came up to see me. 'Harry has gone!' she said, in a voice that was not my friend's. And then she told me that he

'I saw clearly Marian sitting up in bed, her eyes wide open and unseeing"

no argument could convince her to the contrary, that when she and her mother *did* meet in the Dream House it would mean calamity 'Only one power can bring us together there,' she whispered, 'and that is—Death'

"I left her, feeling depressed I was glad that Henry—for so she insisted I should call him—was coming the next had wanted her to marry him at once and go abroad. He had the offer of a good post in Australia. Presently they would make a home for her mother, but for the present Marian must leave her And she would not . . . and so they parted

"I went home with her that evening, and spent it with them At ten o'clock a maid called to walk home with me;

but Marian, in an odd voice, begged me not to go. 'Stay with us to-night,' she implored. It was so unlike Marian. Her mother, too, urged me to stay. She had a frail, pathetic look, and seemed very nervous. So I sent the maid back for my things and stayed."

Outside the wind had risen, and was howling round the house. The girl at my feet crept a little closer.

"I slept with Marian that night. Though it was a long time before she closed her eyes, she was asleep before I was. I felt unaccountably nervous. The little house was very still. Presently I dozed off, then woke suddenly. There was a bright moon, and the window had no curtains, only a thin blind. I saw clearly Marian sitting up in bed by my side, her eyes wide open and unseeing. 'Why, mother!' she said gladly, and smiled. Downstairs, in the little sitting-room below, the clock was striking three; I heard it plainly through the thin floor. She lay down again, and seemed to sleep. I tried in vain to do the same. Why was I so frightened? I asked myself. I was shivering as if from cold, and yet, when I touched my forehead, it was damp. And I did not sleep again that night, though Marian slumbered peacefully. Outside the wind was howling like it does to-night."

There was not one of us who did not move uneasily, or turn to give an apprehensive glance round. The man in the wicker chair had changed his position, and was sitting upright now. He seemed to be very interested.

"I think I dozed a little towards morning, for Marian was moving when I opened my eyes. She had such a bright, expectant look.

"'Lilian,' she said eagerly, "I went to the Dream House last night and met mother. It was not in the least frightening; we met quite naturally, and talked as we never seem to have been able to do before. I think perhaps'—she hesitated, my poor Marian—'I have never really understood mother. I am going to her now.'

"She put on a dressing-gown and went across the narrow passage to her mother's room; and when she did not come back, I followed. But I think I guessed the truth, though Marian seemed to have forgotten the significance of her own words. Her mother had died in her sleep. The doctor said, presently, that nothing could have been done for her. She must have passed away about three o'clock."

There was a silence. Then some one asked what had become of Marian.

"She went out to a brother abroad, to keep house for him," said her friend gently. "But I never saw her again; she died on the voyage out."

One of the girls started up, indignant and impetuous. "But why didn't she marry Harry after all?"

The little woman in grey sighed.

"I do not think," she answered sadly, "he can have *really* cared; for he made no sign. Or perhaps he was proud, and wanted her to recall him. *If* he cared, I think he has his punishment now. I did hear he went out to Australia, and became rich and famous, and had come into property and changed his name. But I do not know."

* * * * *

The dressing gong boomed through the house, and a footman came in, switching on the electric lights abruptly. I saw a tall man, with a sunburnt face, leaving the room with bowed head. On his right cheek, nearest to me, was an odd red scar.

THE BLOOD-RED ROSE.

BY HAROLD BLIND.

ILLUSTRATED BY ARTHUR GARRATT.

OUTSIDE, the tiny, hard-driven snow was drifting into white streaks along the path-edges. The wind was strong from the dark north-east, and it was very cold. The tea-things had been cleared away, and a silence fell as we drew up to the high-heaped fire. I had found Mrs. Mackenzie, the mother of an intimate friend, alone. She is one of the most charming women imaginable; but I remember, as a boy, being terribly afraid of her, and not daring to have a second bun at tea time. She is cloaked about with a coat of icy English reserve that struck awe into our juvenile breasts; but all that is good and beautiful, and typical of quiet English homes and mothers, seems to radiate from this gracious, dark-haired, dark-eyed woman.

To-night, sitting in the firelight, with the storm whining querulously without, she was particularly thoughtful. Her back was towards the fading window, and her face lit up by the fire, and I sat quiet and admired the arched eyebrow, the small straight nose and the tender mouth that made up the delicate profile.

"I have often wondered," said I, breaking the long silence, "who the turbaned officer on the mantelpiece is?"

She took her eyes from the mile deep caverns in the fire and glanced at the faded daguerrotype. "He was a dear friend of my husband's . . . and . . . more than a friend of mine."

"Forgive me . . . if . . ."

"I will tell you about him, if you like, before I go up to dress," she went on gently, looking at the fire with brighter eyes. "When I was a girl we went to India—to my father, who was a colonel of the Guides. We were stationed at—never mind the place—and I met my husband, who was our adjutant, and the officer in the turban, who was his friend. We were right on a troubled borderland, and the outposts, but a few miles away, were often shot at. He, the officer in the turban, taught me to ride, and we used to ride together, often. He was a major, much older than I, and older than my husband. One evening we rode together into the sunset. The sky was a clear crimson, and strange pink rays sprang upwards to the wonderful blue zenith from behind the purple brown hills. We dismounted by a little shrine, and, while we watched the lingering glories of the sky, he told me that he loved me. When he heard my answer he begged me: 'Would you try to love me a little—only a little?'

"And then . . . then we rode, in silence, back to the cantonment. After this I noticed that the adjutant avoided me. As there were only a few English on the station, this change was made, perhaps, more noticeable than it would have been at Simla, Peshawur, or a big cantonment in the plains.

"Well, it was the day before the gymkhana that the officer in the turban gave me some beautiful roses, saying: 'If you wear them to-morrow and give me one, I shall know your answer is Yes. If you don't . . I—I must exchange. I cannot live in this small place and hope to do my work when it is a hopeless task to win the girl I love . . . and . . . perhaps . . . there is some one else?'

"I told him, 'No' there was no one else,' but suddenly I thought of the adjutant.

"That night I saw my mother; and I thought that I was the eldest girl of a large family, and that I liked him well enough to marry him, for he was a good man; and I would do my best to make him happy. So next day I wore the

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roses, and, when we were together for a moment, I gave him one. He was a man who had never really known good women, for his mother had died when he was a baby, and almost all his life had been spent with his Guides amongst the cruel hills. When I had pinned on the rose he looked at me with swimming eyes, and kissed my hand ever so gently, and—'My God! . . .' he said, then—'God bless you!' and he walked away.

"On the second day of the gymkhana, which was, I remember, a Friday, there was a ball. We called it a ball for fun—it was really a musical evening with a little dancing, to which a few of the higher chiefs, who were officers, were invited. On the day before, when I gave him the rose—a deep, dark, red one—my lover seemed very happy, and he had won the first prize in the tent-pegging, in which the second was taken by a daring trooper, his orderly and one of his old squadron. When we were alone in the evening, he made me promise to keep him all the waltzes for to-morrow night. He told me he would be visiting the advanced posts during the day, but would be back in time to change for dinner and the dance; and he said he would go through anything and everything to dance with me. The light in his eyes and the strength of the man made me feel proud of his love; and I thought I loved him in return. At the time, remember, I was only seventeen.

"That Friday morning, when I was going for my ride, I found an old grizzled native officer, who saluted me gravely.

"'The Major-Sahib has ordered me to ride with you to-day, and upon such occasions as, through duty, he himself may be unable. Whither does my lady ride?'

"The old fellow had assumed an air of complete proprietorship, and I should have been angry, but that I knew he had been orderly to Jack's father, and nursed him as a baby, and known him all his life. This morning I wished to gallop alone, but there was nothing for it but to accept my lover's care in the spirit in which it was meant.

"I dressed for dinner that night feeling as happy as a girl could. But Jack did not turn up, and I sat next to Lieutenant Mackensie. As my *fiancé's* greatest friend he had been the first to know of our engagement, and he told me things about him that made me nearly cry. How he had twice saved Mackensie's life in the last war. How all the men loved him, and how his old squadron worshipped him. How he and his men had kept the wild tribesmen at bay for a whole blazing, stifling day's fighting, and saved a brigade from defeat. How he had ridden with his squadron in a desperate charge, been wounded, and saved by the devotion of the old man who had ridden with me that morning, and the terrible courage of the fierce troopers whom he led to their deaths. And I had not heard a word of this from Jack.

"After dinner we received our friends, and the dancing began. Mackensie had slipped away. Three waltzes were over, and I had been wandering about disconsolately, and still my lover did not come. I began to feel annoyed with him for disappointing me and making me the talk of the room. I danced the fourth with Mac, and we agreed to sit out the next. As he took my hand he seemed to make an effort as if he were throwing away a load, and I have never heard him so brilliant before or after, as he was that night. When he took me into a little room opening on to the veranda I was laughing at some silly joke, and Jack was almost driven out of my head. Then with a rush I thought of him.

"'I think it is very horrid of Jack not to turn up: he might have left some of his work for to-morrow,' I said.

"'I'm glad he has not; but, seriously, it must be something quite unavoidable!' said he.

"Like a foolish girl I would not admit it. I had been looking forward to this evening and being envied by the other girls. Mackensie got quite angry with me. Suddenly there was a step and a jingling of spurs and sword in the veranda, and my lover strode to the window. He was very tired and pale, I thought, and his uniform all dusty and smeared with dark mud. He kept his bright, dark eyes on me from under the white helmet.

"'I have kept my word, Kathleen. Sorry to be so late, though. There has been trouble in the hills. Frank, old chap! . . . will you look after Kathleen while I change . . . and . . . now . . . and . . . always? You will, I know . . . and warn Peshawur'—warn Peshawur!'

"He turned abruptly and jingled away into the distance, I seemed to hear him for miles—tinkle tinkle tinkle—but only

just for a second. Frank gripped my bare arm until he almost hurt. I saw that whilst Jack was speaking he held his hand upon his breast above his heart, crumpling up my rose; and the dark red petals slipped out between his fingers, and some clung upon his tunic and his sash. Frank turned his head away from me.

"Frank was looking hard at the steadily burning match.

"'Perhaps,' said he, putting his foot on it—'perhaps.'

"He rejoined me, and I thought he looked rather queer and white.

"'Oh, Frank!' I cried, 'you don't think he's hurt?'

"She took her eyes from the mile-deep caverns in the fire and glanced at the faded daguerrotype."

"'I told you he'd come somehow, we'll go and have supper while he's changing. Beautiful night it is, by Jove!'

"He got up and walked over to the long windows and lit a cigarette, dropping the match on to the matting outside.

"'Jack was very serious,' said I; 'and wasn't he tired and dusty? Do you think he's had a fall?'

"'Certainly not! but I expect he's tired. Come in to supper. He'll be here soon.'

"He took me in, and we drank champagne, and he kept me amused and laughing, and pressed the wine on me. But after a time, when the music had begun again, I wondered why Jack didn't come. He had had lots of time to dress, and I began thinking of him once more.

"'I wonder why Jack was crumpling up my poor red rose?' I asked.

"'Red rose? You saw a . . . Oh! yes, yes, I remember. . . . I expect he had been wearing it all day, and it had fallen to bits as he came into the veranda . . . better give him one of those beauties off your dress!'

"'No! . . . he's keeping me waiting, and he shan't have one!'

"'Well . . . would you mind if I went and hunted him up? . . . and—er—he said something about warning Peshawur, didn't he?'

"'Yes, he said, "Warn Peshawur, warn Peshawur!" Why?'

"'Oh! another row on, I suppose. Sure you don't mind my leaving you?'

"Suddenly, as the music stopped, we heard a clamour of voices. Then a splendid, booted officer—turbaned, clanking—swaggered into the room, and talked quite casually to my father, the colonel, who called Frank to him; and I went with the others to the windows that looked towards the men's quarters. They were all out in a mob round the guard-room, shouting, with murmured intervals, whilst a man on a horse gesticulated and spoke loudly, so that we heard his voice but not the words. It was just like the shouting you hear at French Revolutionary plays. My father and Frank were hurrying towards them. I insisted upon following, dreading I knew not what. Jack, as he stood in the window and spoke so gravely, came before my eyes, every detail distinct, and I felt a creeping horror go over me.

"'Aye! Colonel-Sahib, they killed the Major-Sahib!' It was the Major's orderly, swaying slightly on his steaming horse.

"'Oh, Jack! it was your wraith!' I thought, as the man went on

"'Aye! aye! they slew him by treachery . . . the little boy who was born for the squadron long ago! . . . The lieutenant whom we loved. . . . who led us against those who have slain him . . . Killed him! . . . the boy whom we saw grow to manhood amongst us—who would have been Colonel-Sahib after thee. To horse! comrades, to horse!'

"He saw me in my pale dress in the white moonlight.

"'Comrades!' he was to have married the Colonel-Sahib's daughter. She will have sorrow in her heart for many days. In the narrow gorge they shot him, from behind the rocks. From me they fled. Yea! from me, a single trooper—crying I was mad. I told them, "Wait till six hundred swords are loose along the border! . . ."'

"He waved a dulled sabre round his head, gasped, and fell forward on his horse's neck.

"'See! Colonel Sahib, see! Five great wounds he hath, that, bleeding, cry for vengeance! . . . They call us . . . call us to avenge my baba, whom I carried on my shoulder long ago! . . . Yes, long ago. . . . Saddle!' It was the old native officer who had ridden with me that morning.

"The men of Jack's old squadron raced to the stables; the whole regiment was surging round the dead trooper, and the roar of their voices was like the fall of a mighty wave. Another voice rang clear above it, and the clamour fell and grew more savage. To me it was like a nightmare. I knew dimly that my hands were on my temples, and that I was moaning—I hardly knew why—amidst that snarling din.

"I felt Frank's arms about me. 'He told me to take care of you. You must get inside!'

"I felt dazed, and he almost carried me to our bungalow, and, 'Orders! Colonel-Sahib, give us orders!' they were shouting, shouting, shouting.

* * * * *

"In the morning, as the strident bugles blew the quickening reveille—resonant and clear—they brought my lover home. He had been shot in the centre of the breast—right through the heart. As I saw the wound, I thought with a sudden horror of my rose. Frank says that he saw blood dripping from its fingers when it stood in the doorway and told him to take care of me and warn Peshawur. This was the autumn of the year in which we took the Khyber. When he dropped his match on the veranda and saw no stains, he knew that Jack was dead, and that something dreadful had happened. It must have made me see the rose-leaves, so that I should not be frightened. They found his hand clutching my rose upon the wound . . . my rose all soaked in . . . Oh! I can see it now . . . see it now. . . ."

Mrs. Mackenzie paused. It had grown

"Suddenly there was a step and a jingling of spurs and sword in the verandah"

quite dark outside, and the wind had sobbed itself to sleep and was whimpering in its dreams.

* * * * *

I started at the postman's double knock. The door of the room opened, letting in a broad shaft of light.

"For you, ma'am," said the trim parlour-maid, switching on the lamps, as she took the letters to her mistress.

Mrs. Mackenzie picked them up abstractedly. "You won't mind my leaving you?" she said, "I must really go and dress." She has a way of smiling at you with her eyes. "You know where to find the cigarettes, and—Frank will be in soon."

THE ROUND TABLE.

THE VOICE.

BY BERNARD CAPES.

THE day had been wet and mellow after a longish drought The soil sucked at the warm flood, as a thirsty horse swills at a trough, or a hungry baby at a bottle, drawing in its satisfaction quietly and intently; the cottage windows twinkled under their hats of dripping thatch; the hills, misty and phantasmic, seemed to roll like leviathans in a fog of descending water. And it was under such circumstances of weather that I first saw Balmworth

One could not conceive a village more faithful to its etymology. It saunters down a gentle slope, half a mile long, from the hills to the sea; slips without a stumble into a tiny cove, land locked for nine-tenths of its circumference, and green as a brooch set in a deep hoop of chalk; and elsewhere and on all sides piles itself up with bolsters of sleepy down. Coming from the little station-village of Flock—itself a drowsy portal to the hills—one ascends a three-mile rise, traverses a short tableland, and goes straight down, smiling, into the harbourage of the tranquil valley. What does it concern one that those slumberous pillows of green which contain it are neighboured on either side by populous and popular "seaside resorts"? The hills are ramparts as well as boundaries, and the vulgar, addicted to char-à-bancs and high roads, essay to storm them but fitfully. Let him that enters Balmworth leave fuss and nerves behind.

And the inhabitants are all in keeping. Here are no sharks of landladies, hungering to feed on the inexperienced adventurer; no maximum of cost for a minimum of service; no cracked pianos at a shilling a thump; no castors estimated in the weekly bill at a figure which would keep a furrier in pepper for a year, no priceless china, cheapened from the nearest crockery store, and put up on brackets to be accidentally broken, and paid for; no charge for the attendance which is ever lacking, no suffering protests, no extortion, no inflated prices whatever. No fleas, I was going to add, but, truth to confess, they are in profusion Yet they bite kindly—kiss one into lumps, as it were, with ever a gentle forethought for the provision of the only man in the place who sells insecticide.

Balmworth, to be sure, lets lodgings—indeed, in the "season" it is so greatly affected by those who love not the swarming warrens of August, that it is difficult to secure a bed there—but on an artless Arcadian plan. It is as ready to take in the houseless traveller as it would be to be taken in by him. Any Jeremy Diddler so inclined might steal his dirty week's toll of its hospitableness Its landladies tot up their bills, all wrong, with infinite travail, and finally beg the good graces of their lodgers to help them to screw and pummel the items into some correspondence with the totals. They smile; they confide; they are on pleasant personal, but not in the least self-obtrusive terms with you from the outset (supercilious or baronial-nosed people discomfort them) Sometimes they entreat your acceptance of a basket of blackberries or rosy apples. They are mostly the wives and mothers of the boatmen, to whom appertaineth the conduct of the Cove, sailing and fishing, the letting out of craft, the exploiting, in short, of little Balmworth as a sea pleasure garden.

It is a very quaint and pretty basin among the cliffs, is this Cove—something like Mother Carey's Peace-pool. It is just

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a mile in circumference; and the land's fond arms, not quite meeting round it, leave open a narrow waterway, through which pleasuring steamers can creep in in all but stormy weather. They do not trouble one much. The life of the Cove congregates all the morning about the eastern side, to which they do not come, and where cluster the little white bathing-huts which are the real lodgings of Balmworth. For this pool of translucent water, on whose floor sixteen feet down one may see the weeds swaying pale as if in moonlight, is as grateful to the bather as ever was Castalia to the Muses; and there be those who will camp all day among the little huts, that they may undress and plunge at pleasure.

Opposite the waterway above mentioned sweeps up a mighty forehead of chalk, mottled like old ivory, which, descending gradually as it curves either way about the Cove, ends at the entrance in horns of stratified rock. In the Western arm of this curve is gathered the business material of the place—boats, nets, lobster-pots, prawn chests, lugworms and lumber. It is significant that never a life-belt is to be seen there, unless in the shed where the men of the Coastguard keep their trim black boats with the brass fittings. Balmworth pays no tax to the white-horsed farmers of the sea, and that for a simple reason. When the wind blows enough to imperil small craft, no sailing boat can make the outward passage of the waterway. Even in calm weather so narrow is it that the tripper-steamers have to slip in with caution. Meet that such a place, so secure, so unvexed, so child-like in its character, should be haunted, if at all, by a child's voice.

Perhaps it was the cluck of choked gutters, or the soft trample of the rain on the road, or some inarticulate thin speech of cottager whiming itself into the phantom texture of these; but, as I walked, while the hills sank fading about me into night and water, I could have thought, and more than once, that something ran beside me—a little thing that begged in a little voice, as small trained cadgers do, and sobbed and moaned to rouse my unresponsive sympathy. The impression was so faint, so unreal, that my only wonder lay in its imposing itself on me so persistently. I struggled with myself to resolve it into some far-distant hum of church bells—into some jangle of the innumerable small voices with which, to one's isolated fancy, the stillest night is sown. It would not be put aside. It rose and fell to the pulse of the weather, to the contours of the way—no words, but their shadow; no face but the uplifted glimmering blotch of one, which, when I bent to canvas it, was always a stone in the road.

I felt no distress, but a certain curiosity. That the illusion was an illusion I never had a doubt. The key to the enigma was all that lacked. But I was confident that I should find it, sooner or later.

I went on placidly, descending to the Cove. The lights of an inn, of cottages, met me right and left. And then I was going down a narrow gully, and then—a tongue of ashy water.

It lapped out of the mists, reaching vainly for the rank of little boats which lay thereby, pulled high up on the shingle. Grey wet and desolation held all this quarter of the Cove. Not a light twinkled from the Coastguard station, perched high up on the butt of the western horn. It was just a minute section of beach and sea, contracting or dilating as the fog mumbled it. Not a sign of life was in evidence but the figure of a solitary boatman roping up his craft for the night.

And then, all of a sudden, the voice had become articulate, and I saw the dark form of a little girl go bounding down the stones to the lonely figure. "Bill! Bill!" she cried, "*do* let me pull! Oh, Bill, *do* let me pull!"

The tone pierced so shrill, so childishly treble through that large austerity of gloom, that at the first note a half-hysterical chuckle bubbled from me. And then in the same instant I felt my laugh, irresistible as it had come, a blasphemy. The figure among the boats took no notice whatever.

"Bill!" wailed the child, "*do* let me pull!"

The figure worked on stolidly.

"Is he stone-deaf?" I thought.

She danced round him, crying and entreating—always in that piercing young voice. He could not fail to see, if he had not heard her. Suddenly he rose to his height, his task finished, and came clumping up the shingle towards me. In the same moment the figure of the child seemed to go down into the waters and disappear. With a shout I leapt to my senses, and pursued it. Not a bubble, not a ripple betrayed the place of its

noiseless plunge The tide came in wrinkle over wrinkle, without a fleck I beat back and forth, peering, calling, but with no avail. Finally I desisted, and went up the beach to the man. He at least, though I had questioned it at first, was no ghost. I felt that I was shaking through and through as I approached him. No doubt he thought me demented.

But he essayed a polite reassurance, lighting his pipe with what indifference he could assume. His face revealed itself to me, glowing and shadowing as he pulled at the match. It was the face, indubitably, of a kindly, weatherbeaten boatman, black with strong hair over two-thirds of its surface—no face for callousness or inhumanity. I made up my mind on the instant.

"I thought I heard a child calling down there," I said. "But there wasn't one, of course?"

"Bless you, see," he said, in a curiously little indrawn voice for such a bushy man, "this isn't no night for children."

"No," I replied—"a black night; no sort of weather for one's first visit to your Cove."

"I've never known the like," he answered, looking up at the sky. (They never have.)

His atmosphere invited frankness.

"What's your name?" I asked. He told me. "And your Christian name?"

"Bill, see," said he. (That was his odd pronunciation of "sir.")

He was going up the village, and I was suddenly anxious for his company. I refrained, even, from looking over my shoulder as we left the boats and the whispering crescent of beach.

"Ah!" I said "that was the name I thought I heard the child call—Bill."

"Yes, see?" he responded heartily.

"'Bill,' I thought I heard her say: '*do* let me pull!'" I went on.

"Ah!" he said; "that'll be little Miss Vera."

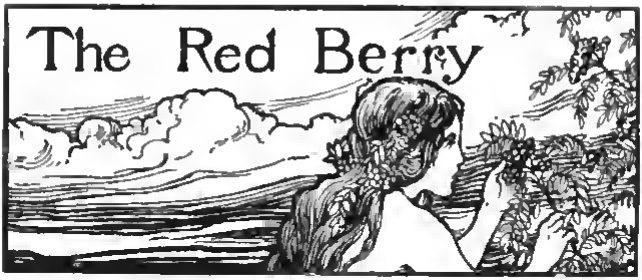
"Little Miss . . . But you said you didn't hear her?"

"No, see," he answered simply. "I can't do it, but others can. She visits us time and again by their showing—the little drownded spirit of her."

"How was she drowned?" My voice seemed something apart from me.

"Had set her heart," he said soberly, "on pulling of a boat all by herself—was always a-crying on me to let her. But I had my orders. She was a bit what you'd call wilful, see; and one evening—it might have been like this" (he had forgotten his former statement)—"she give her mother the slip, where they lodged at Mrs. Sturmey's, and run down to the boats, and had one out, all with her own hands, before a soul knew she was gone." He stopped a moment, sucking at his pipe till it scattered a very comet of sparks into the wet. "I picked up her little body myself," he said. "There it was in the water, as quiet as sleep. She'd just run the boat off of the beach, and herself with it. So she'd never had her pull, after all. God rest her spirit!"

I saw him later, in the tap of "The Pure Drop." He was having his temperate pot and pipe before turning in, and was taking his earnest share in a political discussion. The visitation lay, if it lay at all, quite simply and unharmfully on his mind. Surely this was the right unsophisticated way to accept it. The responsibility for haunting lies with the haunter. As for myself, I have not learned to appreciate Balnworth at a figure less than its due because of that infinite weirdness of my introduction to it. It is a rare haven on a noisy coast; its voices murmur either out of sleep or death. But that one shrill small voice I have never heard again.



BY ELSPETH CAMPBELL.

In the days of old, before Saint Patrick had ever come to Ireland and when Adam and Eve were yet unheard of, children were told this tale.

ILLUSTRATED BY C. M. WATTS.

ONCE upon a time there were only two people in all the world, and these two were a man and a woman. Both of them were very beautiful, even like unto the gods; the man's name was Ulad, and the woman's name was Sorna. They lived in Erin, on a fairy mountain called Ben nan Oig, and the mountain had two peaks on it, one rather higher than the other. All up the slopes of Ben nan Oig were beautiful trees and fruit, and wonderful flowers so sweet that the air was laden with their fragrance. Ulad and Sorna loved the trees and talked to them, and the trees made answer, and thus the man and the woman knew the name of each tree after his kind. And they loved to play with the soft furred animals that frisked about in the sunshine, or to watch them as they slumbered peacefully in the shade, lulled to rest by the humming of the bees and of the dragonflies, who made a soft accompaniment to the glorious singing of choirs of song-birds. Ulad and Sorna also knew and called by their names all the bright butterflies who pursued one another so joyously from flower to flower, or tried to track the sunbeams to their home. But what they loved the best of all was the loch that lay between the two peaks, the loch where the golden-coloured fishes played at hide-and-seek among the water-lilies.

Ever since the world had been made, the man and woman had lived on the fairy mountain, but how long ago that was they could not tell, for time was unknown on Ben nan Oig, neither was there sickness, sorrow, or death there, and no evil thing ever came to the mountain, because it was surrounded and guarded by a great shining white cloud of magic.

And Sorna said to Ulad, "I wish that we could see what is on the other side of the shining cloud. I sometimes think that I hear sounds that come from far away, so that I feel very sure that there must be something that lives beyond the cloud, and I would fain know what it is."

And Ulad answered her and said, "I heard the sounds too, but they were not sweet, neither like the music of the birds nor like the music of the waters, and I do not believe that there is anything beyond the shining cloud that is more beautiful than are the pleasant peaks of Ben nan Oig."

"But, dearest, I only thought that it would be nice to see that which is on the other side of the wall of mist—of course, we would never want to go away from Ben nan Oig. Do let us make one little hole in the cloud, so that we may look through it and see and know what is beyond."

"I am not sure: let us ask the trees what they think."

And the trees whispered, "Evil lies beyond; go not in search of it."

And the man and woman said, "What is Evil?"

Then Ulad asked the birds, "What is on the other side of the shining cloud?"

And the birds sang, "Sorrow dwells

without the cloud; seek not to know her."

And the man and the woman said, "We never heard of Sorrow. Who is Sorrow?"

But the birds knew no more.

Then they consulted the beasts, and the beasts said, "We believe that Death stands somewhere beyond the white cloud, but that is all that we can tell you."

"I would like to know further," Sorna said, "and find out who Evil and Sorrow and Death may be, and if we can make but one little hole and look through it and see, I will be content for ever."

Sorna and Ulad wandered down to the great white wall of mist that circled their mountain, but every time that they went too near it, a mighty wind hurled them backwards, so that they had no chance of making even the very smallest of holes, and Sorna was displeased.

"We must think of some way of seeing through this hateful cloud; there must be some way."

But many ages passed in the outer world, and yet the great white wall of mist remained as it was.

It chanced that once, when the man and the woman were standing on the topmost point of the highest peak of Ben nan Oig, and Sorna was leaning against the marble cairn that they had put there, Ulad saw something red fall with a little splash on to one of the snow-white stones. "Look, Sorna! look!" he cried. "Where can they have come from?" Sorna looked, and saw one drop of what she thought was beautiful red water; she had never seen blood.

"How pretty it is! and how did it get here?"

Sorna and Ulad looked up to the sky, just too late to see the great eagle who had passed above the shining cloud wall and had now disappeared again, back to that outer world whence he had come. In his cruel talons was a white bird, and from the bird a drop of blood had fallen.

"Oh, Ulad, how strange a thing! the red is turning quite brown. I do not think that I like it any more."

"It seemed to me that I saw two drops fall," Ulad said. "Let us find the other one and see if it has turned brown too."

However, as they found no other drop, either red or brown, they very soon forgot all about the strange new water, and sought for it no more, but began weaving garlands of flowers; then, when they had adorned one another with the garlands, they wandered back to the water-lily loch, singing as they went.

Now what Ulad had seen and had thought was more "red water" was really a rowan-berry that had fallen from the beak of the poor white bird on to the stones of the cairn, and then had rolled away and lay hidden among the grass and the flowers.

The next time that the man and the woman came to the marble cairn, they found a tree growing beside it, and it was quite different to any tree that they had ever seen before. The tree was covered with beautiful white flowers, and Sorna was wild with delight when she saw them.

"What is your name, O tree with the beautiful white flowers?" she asked, "and how came you here?"

But the tree said nothing, as it is only the fairy trees that can speak, and this tree had once been a rowan-berry on another tree in the world beyond the shining wall of mist.

"What a strange tree! It cannot speak, and I do not believe that it even knows its own name." Sorna laughed joyously as she said this, and began making for herself a chaplet of the flowers.

"Dearest Sorna, I do not like this tree; there is something strange about it, that it either cannot or will not speak. Every other tree speaks and tells us things. Come away, love, down to the water-lily loch, and we shall see which of all the fishes can leap the highest and get the nearest to the sun."

Then Sorna threw away the white flowers that she had gathered, and said, "The tree is no fairer than the other trees, I too will have none of it." And so they left the marble cairn, and returned not to the tree for what we in the outer world would call more than a hundred years.

Yet they could see the tree from afar when they were standing on the second peak of Ben nan Oig, and the changing colours of the tree, according to the seasons of the outer world, filled both the man and the woman with wonder, and at last they felt that they must go back to the marble cairn and speak with the tree once more. When they came there they found the tree with thousands of clusters of bright red berries where the blossoms had been before. Sorna and

Ulad rejoiced exceedingly when they saw the beauty of the tree.

"Tell us your name and where you come from, O tree with the berries," Ulad cried; but the tree said nothing. Then Sorna gathered clusters of the berries and arranged them in her hair, and Ulad thought how beautiful the scarlet looked against the raven darkness of her tresses.

When Sorna saw the delight of her beloved, and his admiration for her loveliness, she laughed for very gladness, and gathered yet more of the rowan berries. After she had taken as many as she could hold in her two hands, she and Ulad went down the mountain together.

But when they drew near to the fairy mist, the face of the woman clouded over, and she uttered the old complaint, "Shall we never see beyond?" and she threw one of her rowan berries at the shining white wall. To her utter amazement, the berry pierced the wall, leaving a little hole to mark its track. Ulad and Sorna drew nearer to the wall, and with every step that they took they wondered more and more, for this time no fairy wind drove them back. Sorna arrived at the wall first, and with a cry of delight she put her eye to the little hole and looked through it. "Oh, Ulad, Ulad! I can see!"

"What can you see?"

"Right on the other side is a silver pathway, quite straight; it goes on and on, and it is more beautiful than anything that I have ever seen. Look at it, dearest, and tell me what you think it is."

Ulad put his eye to the hole, but he had hardly had time to see anything before Sorna implored him to let her have another look. She was absolutely fascinated by what she saw, and stayed at the hole so long that Ulad grew weary of waiting. "Dear one," he said gently, "I too would fain see that which you think is so beautiful."

Sorna then laughed, and answered, "It may be that we both can see." And she threw a second rowan berry at the wall. It also pierced the wall, leaving another little hole where it had passed; and now there were two windows in the white fairy cloud.

And the trees whispered, "Beware! take care! for Evil lies beyond the wall, and is waiting for you."

But the man and the woman would not listen to the warning voices of the trees, and gave no thought to anything, save to the pathway that they saw through the two little holes, the pathway shining in its silver glory. They did not hear the song of the birds, though they sang their loudest, and this was the burden of their song: "Come away!—come away! Look not at the silver road, for it leads but to the home of Sorrow and of Death, and they are waiting for you Come away!—come away!"

But ever the man and woman looked, and as they looked they longed more and more to follow along the silver road

And Ulad said, "Ah! would that we might win a way through the white cloud and travel together the silver road, the road of beauty!"

Then Ulad sought to break through the fairy mist, but it was solid even as a marble rock is solid, save for the two little windows made by the rowan berries And Ulad was ill pleased, and he frowned as he watched the silver pathway.

Suddenly Sorna clapped her hands together in great delight, and cried: "Ulad, I have an idea, and I believe that I am right."

"What is your idea?"

"The tree, the tree with the red berries that knows not its own name, or, knowing it, will not tell it to us, is a tree that has strange powers; and I believe that were we each to bear a branch of it in our hands, we could make for ourselves a way through the cloud to the silver pathway that lies beyond."

And Ulad listened to the words of Sorna, and her counsel pleased him. So they went to the rowan-tree and spoke to it once more, saying, "O beautiful nameless one, we desire of you that you help us, for we seek to follow the silver road that lies beyond the white cloud of enchantment. Give us, we pray you, of your branches, that we may bear them with us and make for ourselves a way."

The man and the woman waited for a while, but the tree said nothing, and neither gave nor yet withheld its branches. Then Sorna said, "Poor beautiful tree, I know full well that you desire that we gather your branches, and were you but able to speak, you would tell us so"

Ulad gathered a branch of the rowan-tree for himself and one also for Sorna, and then, when they had given thanks, they returned to their two little windows

and looked through the cloud of enchantment once more.

Sorna kept her eye to the hole without speaking for some moments; then she turned to Ulad and said, "Surely the silver road is less silver now, and I think that I see a darkness far away. Oh, Ulad, let us not go!"

But Ulad would not listen, and he took

"Ever since the world had been made, the man and woman had lived on the fairy mountain."

his branch of rowan and, lifting it up on high, he struck wildly out with it at the great white wall. The wall opened and he passed through it, and Sorna gave a cry and sped after him.

The man and the woman passed through the fairy mist, but they found no pathway on the other side, only a vast plain stretching before them as far as they could see, and the plain was bare and unfruitful, and nothing grew there but grass and briars and brambles and whins. The grass was all brown and withered, for it was late autumn in the outer world, and the wind was moaning a sad story about the winter that was to come, and it was so cold that the man and the woman shivered. However, they went on bravely, for they thought that beyond the plain they would find the silver way. The whins and the briars pricked them as they passed along, but although the pain made them weep, and all the strange sounds that they heard filled their hearts with fear, they turned not back, so great was their eagerness to find the Silver Road of Beauty.

At last Ulad cried, "The way grows darker and there is no silver anywhere Let us return to Ben nan Oig"

But Sorna was too weary even to answer, and she sat down on a stone and sobbed as if her heart would break. Ulad sought to comfort her, but his words of comfort were drowned in tears. The first man and the first woman wept together, and neither the man nor the woman knew what ailed them, for Suffering and Sorrow had never been on Ben nan Oig; they dwelt with Evil and Death beyond the circle of the fairy cloud.

Now while the man and the woman tarried, the darkness came on, and strange creatures of the night flitted round about them, and Sorna felt sick with fear. Then Ulad took her by the hand and raised her up, saying, "My dearest love, lean but on me and we will return to Ben nan Oig, and when we shall have passed once more through the shining mist, let us make this promise one to the other, that we shall never seek to know any further of Evil, of Sorrow, or of Death, and we shall never leave our mountain again."

The man and the woman then dried their tears, and hand in hand they sought to grope their way through the darkness, till at last Sorna stumbled and fell because of her great weariness.

Ulad and Sorna slept for many hours, and when they wakened, daylight had come. "Surely now that we can see," Ulad cried, "we shall find our way back to the pleasant peaks of Ben nan Oig."

"I cannot see the white cloud wall anywhere," Sorna wailed, and she wept.

They looked in every direction for the shining mist, but all in vain, and the only thing that the man and the woman could see, breaking the weary level of the plain, was a great mountain, and the mountain had two peaks on it, one rather higher than the other. On the highest peak there grew a single tree, but otherwise the mountain looked cold and desolate, for nothing else was growing there, not even a blade of grass. The whole mountain was but a barren rock. Ulad and Sorna never found the shining fairy mist again; it had melted and gone.

Ulad built a little house on the plain, among the whin-bushes, and he and Sorna lived there and grew old together; but before they were very old they learned much of Evil, of Sorrow, and of Death. Yet they knew also great joy, for Love is joy, and their love was strengthened by suffering, and children were born unto them—children that brought more and more love into their lives.

And Love had such power over the man and the woman that they longed no more for Ben nan Oig. So when the whin-bushes bloomed, the golden blossoms seemed to their eyes as beautiful and as sweet as any of the flowers that they remembered on the fairy mountain. And the skylark sang to them and told them of a land where they would be young once more, a land where the paths are of silver, and where no sorrow is—a happy after-world that is far fairer than Ben nan Oig.

"Love Sorrow Death"

"'The fact is, I've decided to lighten your labours by taking a second wife

THE SECOND MRS. UG.

A PREHISTORIC TALE.

BY CHARLES GLEIG.

ILLUSTRATED BY E. T. REED.

WHEN old Sux died—full of years, renown, and rheumatism—Ug became chief of the tribe of cave-dwellers that lived upon the shore of the Bristol Channel. It has previously been mentioned, although the point has slight bearing upon the following prehistoric legend, that the Sux tribe was probably settled, and for a couple of centuries at least, upon that part of the Somersetshire coast that lies between Portishead and Clevedon. It is even possible that certain flint scrapers and arrow-heads, recently discovered in that picturesque vicinity by Professor Oxhead, and now lodged in the British Museum, may, countless ages ago, have been used by the redoubtable Ug. Looking upon these relics of the dim past, I like to fancy that many a reindeer steak (presumably without onions) may have been secured to pretty Zug and her family through the agency of these rude arrow-heads. They must have hurt the reindeer a good deal, but that is unlikely to have troubled their prehistoric hunters. It is better to be a modern rabbit than an ancient reindeer, as some learned theosophists are aware.

But this is not a hunting legend. It concerns a purely domestic crisis in the lives of Ug and Zug.

Ug was still a young man when he became chief of the tribe, and he had been espoused to Zug during some four years. Now, it was customary in those days—as, indeed, until many thousands of years later—for chiefs to support several wives and families. Alive to his own dignity, to his obligations as head of the tribe, and perhaps, also, to the personal attractions of a certain young maiden named Su, Ug had scarcely filled his new position for more than a week when he began to feel that another wife and family were essential. Returning from the chase one evening—he still hunted from personal choice—his sense of tribal duty was deeply stirred by a very trivial incident. Striding homeward, with a haunch of reindeer on his shoulder, he chanced to encounter Zug's pretty cousin, Su. She was richly oiled, wore a valuable set of bone ornaments about her fair person, and, in short, as malicious persons might have said, the young lady was attired for conquest. But, as Ug approached the grassy bank upon which the girl was seated, he noted with concern that she was holding her right foot in her shapely hand, and rocking to and fro from evident pain.

"What ails thee, fair Su?" he asked sympathetically.

"There's a nasty, horrid thorn in my foot, O Chief!" she replied. "I was running after a silly rabbit, and didn't see the stupid bramble on the path."

Her statement conflicted glaringly with the studied elaboration of her costume, but Ug was a plain-dealing man, and believed the designing minx.

"It's a shame thou shouldst have to chase rabbits for thy supper," said the Chief gallantly. "Were I thy lord, Su, thou shouldst sit in my cave all day and sew thyself beautiful garments of the best skins in the land."

"That would be lovely," she replied artfully.

At heart she was lazy and detested sewing. She said the sinew thread hurt her hands, which was palpably absurd, for the sewing of skins was less arduous work than modern sail-making, or the hemming of coal sacks.

Ug, feeling very cousinly at sight of her distress, sat down beside her, seized her foot, and plucked out a medium-sized thorn before she could say "Oh!" She said it, however, immediately afterwards, and puckered up her pretty face as though enduring severe pain from the extraction. Zug had scorned to have winked an eyelash in such circumstances; yet, somehow, the cowardice of Su seemed girlish and attractive to the Chief. In some subtle way, her shrinking from pain flattered his manhood, and accentuated the contrast of sex.

He raised the injured foot to his lips, unconsciously anticipating the exaggerated gallantry of the eighteenth century A.D. True, he would not have done it in public. The Sux men knew how to keep women in their place. There was consequently no "Woman Question" at this hardy period, on the shores of the Bristol Channel at all events. In Egypt possibly . . . but Ug had never heard of Egypt, nor would he have believed in it if he had.

Legend throws little further light upon the balance of this romantic incident, being more concerned with tribal fights and such robust affairs. One may surmise, however, that Ug really did offer the maiden a half share of his stout heart, a section of his cave (possibly one all to herself), and other solid attractions likely to weigh with a girl who needed care and luxury and regular meals.

This deduction is warranted, and without a little imagination the bare places in the legend cannot be darned. I believe it was quite late before Ug got home; but Zug was sitting up for her lord at the mouth of their well-ventilated cave, combing her dark tresses with a flint by the light of the eternal stars.

When they had eaten their fill of raw reindeer haunch—Zug said it was much too late for cooking—the amorous Chief thought the opportunity favourable to the revelation of his plan. He craftily began by hinting that his beloved "Lake Eyes" looked overworked, and needed a lady-help about the cave.

Zug's suspicions were instantly roused. He only called her by that endearing, ante-nuptial name when he wanted something done for him.

"It is a happiness to work in the cave of a mighty chief," she demurely replied.

Which, to be sure, was a properly docile sentiment, but, on the whole, baffling.

"The fact is," continued Ug, "I've decided to lighten your labours by taking a second wife."

There was a marked silence, but Mrs. Ug's eyes spoke volumes.

Ug squirmed slightly, but proceeded to dwell, blunderingly enough, upon the domestic obligations of a great chief like himself. Old Sux, he reminded her, had never shirked matrimony. Her honoured father had maintained a score of wives, and had reared an enormous family—more or less upon the tribal rates. Sux, perhaps, had allowed his patriotism to carry him rather too deep into matrimony. Moderation, he argued, was desirable, yet, as Zug must perceive, two wives were not only essential to his dignity, but the arrangement would also relieve his best beloved of half the domestic work.

"It depends a little on No. 2," murmured Zug. "If my honoured lord would be guided by his little 'Lake-Eyes,' she would find him a really industrious second wife."

She was taking it rather well, Ug thought. "Of what maiden are you thinking?" he asked, humouring her.

"Of Fig, the daughter of Poop," she replied, naming one of the very plainest girls of the tribe.

"No," said Ug firmly. "She won't do at all. Her skin is as dark as the bark of the walnut-tree, and her eyes are as dull as a puddle of foul water among the rocks. My choice is already made," he added bluntly.

"Ah!" said Zug, clasping her fingers convulsively, and turning her head away. It was, no doubt, a bitter moment in the matron's hitherto happy life; but still, like a well-bred woman, she hid her resentment from him. Perhaps a plan for baffling Ug was already shaped in her mind.

"My choice has fallen upon your kinswoman, Su, the daughter of Snart, your great father's brother," he said.

"She is a fair maid," replied Zug quietly. "I hope my honoured lord has chosen well."

"I am seldom mistaken," he said.

"Yet, my lord, the fairest fruit is sometimes rotten within," Zug hazarded.

"Fruit, perhaps," he agreed. "We spoke of women. None were fairer than thou, my wife, when I won thee from the treacherous Fig."

"Let us go to rest," said Zug, closing the discussion. She rose and entered the cave. Ug followed, securing the entrance against wild beasts in the customary manner. Soon he fell asleep; but Zug, tossing beside him upon their rocky couch, closed never an eye that night.

. . . . . .

For breakfast next morning Zug prepared for her lord a nutritious mess of slugs—a dainty to which he was extremely partial. Ug was pleased, but noted with passing concern that his wife ate nothing.

So, when he had quite cleared the primitive bowl, he asked what ailed her.

"My lord," she said, "I have had a strange adventure in the spirit."

"Say on," said Ug, who, in common with the men of his period, attached a superstitious importance to dreams.

Zug, after a reflective pause, narrated her alleged dream as follows: "Last night, O Chief, I stood in the spirit within the cave of Snart, the father of Su. Their bodies slept, but their spirits held converse together."

Ug grunted uneasily, but bade her continue.

"'Methought I heard the spirit of Snart say to the spirit of Su: 'Daughter, beware this marriage with the chief of our tribe. The chief Ug is a mighty warrior, and he loves thee well; yet should he marry thee, a great ill will befall him and our tribe.'"

"'What ill, father?' asked the spirit of the maiden.

"'An ill that shall come upon him through thy first born son,' answered the spirit of Snart.

"'Canst thou tell me what ill, O father?'

"'Thy son will be a mighty chief,' said Snart, 'mightier than Ug in battle, swifter than he in the chase. Yet Ug is a wise ruler, and this chief, thy son, will lack wisdom. So, when he cometh to manhood, he will cause the eyes of Ug to be put out, and the wise chief Ug will rule over the tribe no more. Therefore, my daughter, what answer should I give to Ug to-morrow, when he demandeth thee for his wife.'

"'Then the spirit of Su answered thus: 'Be prudent, O father, and give me to Ug. For, if you refuse, he will strip our cave as bare as a new-born child. But if you consent that I should wed with him, the Chief will give you many skins and weapons, and the voice of my father shall long be heard in the councils of the tribe.'"

"Su"

Zug paused and regarded her lord with sorrowful eyes, apologising mutely for her spiritual adventure.

Ug frowned and was evidently impressed. He didn't want to be deposed and blinded by his future son, nor did he like the prospect of assisting to bring into his little world an Admirable Crichton destined to outshine him as warrior and hunter. Still, he was very much attracted by Snart's daughter, and the threatened danger was remote. He paced the cave in silence for some minutes, and presently his frown relaxed as he thought of a way of upsetting the prediction of Snart's interfering spirit.

"It would be easy enough," he considered, "to take Su's first born out for a walk and drop him over the cliffs." Ethically, too, this somewhat drastic measure seemed to his primitive mind quite excusable. Zug, who did not credit her lord with much intelligence, except

in the arts of war and the chase, was disappointed to find him resolved to persevere with his domestic project.

"Say nothing of what you heard in the spirit to any man," he commanded.

so that Ug lost no time in striking a bargain with Su's father, and in issuing his invitations for the wedding gorge. As he had to invite the entire tribe, the process was simple, but the hard work

"The old priest . . . had to keep his job and the pickings of office

"Snart is an old fool, so it may well be that his spirit was at fault. I shall marry the maid on the eve of the new moon, but Su's spirit made a thundering error in supposing that old Snart will be admitted to the Council."

The new moon was due in three nights, fell to Zug, for she had to superintend the preparation of the feast. Custom demanded that every guest should be supplied with a pint of toilette oil a day in advance of the ceremony, whilst the feast had to be planned upon an equally lavish scale. The tribal bard was com-

manded to compose a prose eulogy of the beauty of Su and the valour and wisdom of Ug, which he was to recite just before the feast began, accompanied by Mug on the drum.

To all outward appearance, Zug went about her festive and culinary preparations with a light and docile heart. Only to a very few intimate friends did she confide her unfavourable opinion of the bride. And with one reservation she obeyed Ug's command. To the head priest alone she revealed her alleged dream, and there is reason to believe that she won him over to her own way of thinking by the artless expedient of promising him all sorts of tit bits from the store of food at her command.

Perhaps she had hoped that the head priest would oppose the wedding. If so, she was disappointed, for the wily ecclesiastic, in response to her hints, gave her a dull, conventional lecture upon the duty of first wives to welcome second, third, or even twentieth wives to their lords' caves in a spirit of womanly submission. Privately, the old priest may have sympathised with her, but he had to keep his job and the pickings of office. He agreed, however, to do what he could for Zug in the impeobable event of obtaining any spiritual warning himself, or if, by any chance, the ancestors of the tribe should manifest, by some unmistakable sign, their disapproval of the impending union.

Content with this conditional support, the fair Zug set about engineering a manifestation of ancestral disapprobation "off her own bat."

. . . . . .

With the first appearance of the new moon, the Sux tribe sat down to a banquet so lavish that the tribal bard went bankrupt of adjectives over the first course, and miserably failed to express the fervour of the guests. A flying dragon, roasted whole (the gift of the bridegroom to the chiefs), is referred to in the legends as having served as dessert for those who ate with Ug and the Council. We trace allusions, also, to reindeer kidneys boiled in blubber, and other rare dainties originated perhaps by the culinary genius of Zug.

The wedding ceremony, according to well-established custom, was to have been solemnised after the third course (boiled bear, with garlic flavouring), but when the bride arrived and was led up to Ug, to receive the customary three smacks in token of her submission, the chief started back with a cry of disgust.

"Shades of my ancestors!" faltered Ug, "her face is as dark as night."

Poor Su fell upon her knees, and begged him to bestow the customary smacks upon his loving bride, but Ug, his superstitions fully roused, was also repelled by the soiling of her beauty.

In vain old Snart predicted that the stain would presently wear off, leaving his daughter fairer than ever. For a moment Ug seemed to hesitate, but when Zug whispered in his ear, "Remember the dream," superstition triumphed.

"Take her away," roared the Chief angrily, and, fearing his wrath, even foolish old Snart refrained from further argument.

Although Ug and the whole tribe regarded Su's misfortune as a clear sign of ancestral disapproval of the union, modern students of these old legends will readily surmise that the disfigurement was due to natural causes. The truth is, that Zug had discovered accidentally the properties of walnut juice, and during the three days preceding the feast she had prepared a skin lotion for Su. This done, she had easily bribed Haka, the beauty specialist of the tribe, and an ignorant old quack, to recommend the lotion to Su. The maiden had been gulled into the belief that the lotion would impart to her skin a ravishing transparency, calculated to rivet the affections of Ug, and Haka had insisted that the mixture would lose its virtues unless applied in the dark, and on the night before the nuptials.

Thus Zug triumphed, and continued to monopolise her lord's affections. But at the moment Ug was so annoyed by the interference of the spirits, whose behaviour was certainly inconsistent, that he would have put a stop to the feast but for the thrifty advice of his wife. "Let them gobble, O Ug," she urged, "for if some day you should take another wife, we shall, at any rate, be a feast to the good."

THE CURATE'S FRIEND.

BY E. M FORSTER.

ILLUSTRATED BY A. WALLIS MILLS.

IT is uncertain how the Faun came to be in Wiltshire. Perhaps he came over with the Roman legionaries, to live with his friends in camp, talking to them of Lucretilis or Garganus or of the slopes of Etna; they in the joy of their recall forgot to take him on board, and he wept in exile; but at last he found that our hills also understood his sorrows, and rejoiced when he was happy. Or, perhaps, he came to be there because he had been there always. There is nothing particularly classical about a faun—it is only that the Greeks and Italians have ever had the sharpest eyes. You will find him in the *Tempest* and the Benedicite; and any country which has beech clumps and sloping grass and very clear streams may reasonably produce him.

How I came to see him is a more difficult question. For to see him there is required a certain quality, for which truthfulness is too cold a name and animal spirits too coarse a one, and he alone knows how this quality came to be in me. No man has the right to call himself a fool, but I may say that I then presented the perfect semblance of one. I was facetious without humour and serious without conviction. Every Sunday I would speak to my rural parishioners about the other world in the tone of one who has been behind the scenes, or I would explain to them the errors of the Pelagians, or I would warn them against hurrying from one dissipation to another. Every Tuesday I gave what I called "straight talks to my lads"—talks which led straight past anything awkward. And every Thursday I addressed the Mothers' Union on the duties of wives or widows, and gave them practical hints on the management of a family of ten.

I took myself in, and for a time I certainly took in Emily. I have never known a girl attend so carefully to my sermons, or laugh so heartily at my jokes. It is no wonder that I became engaged. She has made an excellent wife, freely correcting her husband's absurdities, but allowing no one else to breathe a word against them; able to talk about the sub-conscious self in the drawing-room, and yet have an ear for the children crying in the nursery, or the plates breaking in the scullery. An excellent wife—better than I even imagined. But she has not married me.

Had we stopped indoors that afternoon nothing would have happened. It was all owing to Emily's mother, who insisted on our 'tea-ing' out. Opposite the village, across the stream, was a small chalk down, crowned by a beech copse and a few Roman earthworks. (I lectured very

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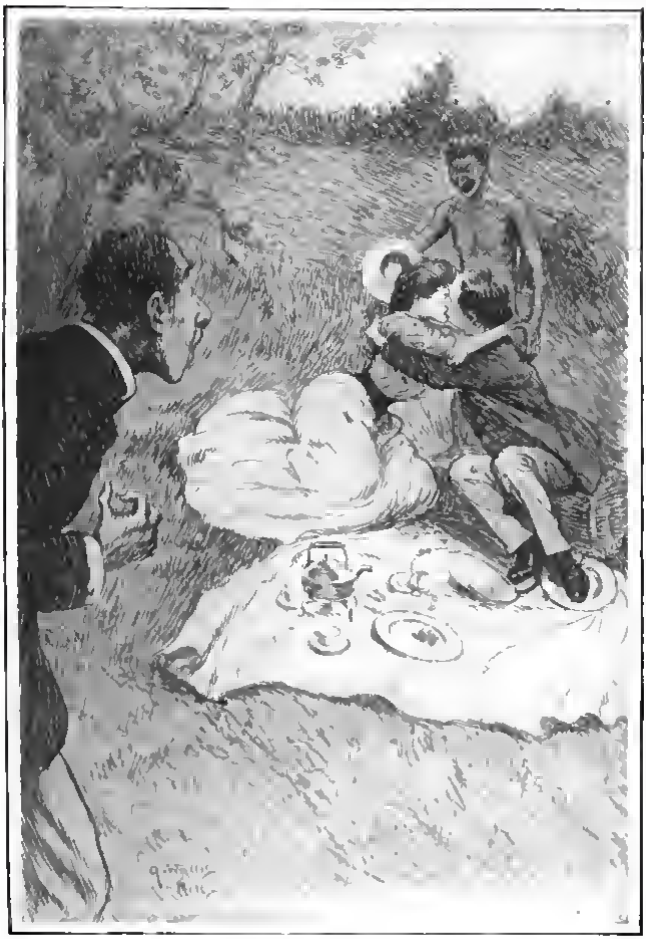


"Then the faun laid his hands upon them"

vividly on those earthworks: they have since proved to be Saxon). Hither did I drag up a tea-basket and a heavy rug for Emily's mother, while Emily and a little friend went on in front. The little friend—who has played all through a much less important part than he supposes—was a pleasant youth, full of intelligence and poetry—especially of what he called the poetry of earth. He longed to wrest earth's secret from her, and I have seen him press his face passionately into the grass, even when he has believed himself to be alone. Emily was at that time full of vague aspirations, and though I should have preferred them all to have centred in me, yet it seemed unreasonable to deny her such other opportunities for self-culture as the neighbourhood provided.

It was then my habit, on reaching the top of any eminence, to exclaim facetiously, "And who will stand on either hand and keep the bridge with me?"—at the same moment violently agitating my arms or casting my wideawake at an imaginary foe. Emily and the friend received my sally as usual, nor could I detect any insincerity in their mirth. Yet I was convinced that some one was present who did not think I had been funny, and any public speaker will understand my growing uneasiness.

I was somewhat cheered by Emily's mother, who puffed up, exclaiming, "Kind Harry, to carry the things! What should we do without you even now! Oh, what a view! Can you see the dear cathedral? No, too hazy. Now *I'm* going to sit *right* on the rug." She smiled mysteriously. "The downs in September, you know."

We gave some perfunctory admiration to the landscape, which is indeed only beautiful to those who admire land, and to them, perhaps, the most beautiful in England. For here is the body of the great chalk spider who straddles over our island—whose legs are the South Downs and the North Downs and the Chilterns, and the tips of whose toes poke out at Hunstanton and Dover. He is a clean creature, who grows as few trees as he can, and those few in tidy clumps, and he loves to be tickled by quickly flowing streams. He is pimpled all over with earthworks, for from the beginning men have fought for the privilege of standing on him, and the oldest of our temples is built upon his back.

But in those days I liked my country smug and pretty, full of gentlemen's residences and shady bowers and people who touch their hats. The great sombre expanses, on which one may walk for miles and hardly shift a landmark or meet a genteel person were still intolerable to me. I turned away as soon as propriety allowed, and said, "And may I now prepare the cup that cheers?"

Emily's mother replied, "Kind man to help me! I always do say that tea out is worth the extra effort. I wish we led simpler lives." We agreed with her. I spread out the food. "Won't the kettle stand? Oh, but *make* it stand!" I did so. There was a little cry, faint, but distinct, as of something in pain.

"How silent it all is up here!" said Emily.

I dropped a lighted match on the grass, and again I heard the little cry.

"What is that?" I asked.

"I only said it was so silent,' said Emily.

"Silent, indeed!" echoed the little friend.

Silent! The place was full of noises. If the match had fallen in a drawing-room it could not have been worse, and the loudest noise came from beside Emily herself. I had exactly the sensation of going to a great party, of waiting to be announced in the echoing hall, where I could hear the voices of the guests, but could not yet see their faces. It is a nervous moment for a self-conscious man, especially if all the voices should be strange to him, and he has never met his host.

"My dear Harry," said the elder lady, "never mind about that match. That'll smoulder away and harm no one. Tea-ee-ee! I always say—and you will find Emily the same—that as the magic hour of five approaches, no matter how good a lunch, one begins to feel a sort of——"

Now the faun is of the kind who capers upon the Neo-Attic reliefs, and if you do not notice his ears or see his tail you take him for a man, and are horrified.

"Bathing!" I cried wildly. "Such a thing for our village lads; but I quite agree—more supervision—I blame myself. Go away, bad boy!—go away!"

"What will he think of next?" said Emily, while the creature beside her stood up and beckoned to me. I advanced, struggling and gesticulating, with tiny steps and horrified cries, exorcising the

apparition with my hat. Not otherwise had I advanced the day before, when Emily's nieces showed me their guinea-pigs. And by no less hearty laughter was I greeted now. Until the strange fingers closed upon me, I still thought that here was one of my parishioners, and did not cease to exclaim, "Let me go, naughty boy!—let go!" And Emily's mother, believing herself to have detected the joke, replied, "Well, I must confess they are naughty boys, and reach one even on the rug—the downs in September, as I said before."

Here I caught sight of the tail, uttered a wild shriek, and fled into the beech copse behind.

"Harry would have been a born actor," said Emily's mother as I left them.

I realised that a great crisis in my life was approaching, and that if I failed in it I might permanently lose my self-esteem. Already in the wood, I was troubled by a multitude of voices—the voices of the hill beneath me, of the trees over my head, of the very insects in the bark of the tree. I could even hear the stream licking little pieces out of the meadows, and the meadows dreamily protesting. Above the din—which is no louder than the flight of a bee—rose the faun's voice, saying, "Dear priest, be placid!—be placid! Why are you frightened?"

"I am not frightened," said I—and indeed I was not. "But I am grieved; you have disgraced me in the presence of ladies."

"No one else has seen me," he said, smiling idly. "The women have tight boots, and the man has long hair. Those kind never see. For years I have only spoken to children, and they lose sight of me as soon as they grow up. But you will not be able to lose sight of me, and, until you die, you will be my friend. Now I begin to make you happy: lie upon your back, or run races, or climb trees, or shall I get you blackberries or harebells or wives?"

In a terrible voice I said to him, "Get thee behind me!" He got behind me. "Once for all," I continued, "let me tell you that it is vain to tempt one whose happiness consists in giving happiness to others."

"I cannot understand you," he said ruefully. "What is to tempt?"

"Poor woodland creature!" said I, turning round. "How could you understand? It was idle of me to chide you. It is not in your little nature to comprehend a life of self-denial. Ah, if only I could reach you!"

"You have reached him," said the hill.

"If only I could touch you!"

"You have touched him," said the hill.

"But I will never leave you," burst out the faun. "I will sweep out your shrine for you; I will accompany you to the meetings of matrons; I will enrich you at the bazaars."

I shook my head. "For these things I care not at all. And, indeed, I was minded to reject your offer of service altogether. There I was wrong. You shall help me—you shall help me to make others happy."

"Dear priest, what a curious life! People whom I have never seen—people who cannot see me—why should I make them happy?

"My poor lad! perhaps in time you will learn why. Now begone!—commence! On this very hill sits a young lady for whom I have a high regard. Commence with her. Aha! your face falls. I thought as much. You *cannot* do anything. Here is the conclusion of the whole matter!"

"I can make her happy," he replied, "if you order me; and when I have done so perhaps you will trust me more."

Emily's mother had started home, but Emily and the little friend still sat beside the tea things—she in her white piqué dress and biscuit straw, he in his rough but well cut summer suit. The great pagan figure of the faun towered insolently above them.

The friend was saying, "And have you never felt the appalling loneliness of a crowd?"

"All that," replied Emily, "have I felt, and very much more."

Then the faun laid his hands upon them. They, who had only intended a little cultured flirtation, resisted him as long as they could, but were gradually urged into each other's arms, and embraced with passion.

"Miscreant!" I shouted, bursting from the wood. "You have betrayed me."

"I know it; I care not," cried the little friend. "Stand aside! You are in the presence of that which you do not understand. In the great solitude we have found ourselves at last."

Original from

"Remove your accursed hands!" I shrieked to the faun.

He obeyed, and the little friend continued more calmly: "It is idle to chide. What should you know, poor clerical creature, of the mystery of love, of the eternal man and the eternal woman, of the self-effectuation of a soul?"

"That is true," said Emily angrily. "Harry, you would never have made me happy. I shall always treat you as a friend, but how could I give myself to a man who makes such silly jokes? When you played the buffoon at tea your hour was scaled. I must be treated seriously; I must see infinities broadening round me as I rise. You may not approve of it, but so I am. In the great solitude I have found myself at last."

"Wretched girl!" I cried. "Great solitude! O pair of helpless puppets!"

The little friend began to lead Emily away, but I heard her whisper to him, "Dear, we can't possibly leave the basket for Harry after this; and mother's rug, do you mind having that in the other hand?"

So they departed, and I flung myself upon the ground with every appearance of despair.

"Does he cry?" asked the faun.

"He does not cry," answered the hill. "His eyes are as dry as pebbles."

My tormentor made me look at him. "I see happiness at the bottom of your heart," said he.

"I trust I have my secret springs," I answered stiffly.

And then I prepared a scathing denunciation, but of all the words I might have said, I only said one, and it began with "D."

He gave a joyful cry. "Oh, now you really belong to us! To the end of your life you will swear when you are cross and laugh when you are happy. Now laugh!"

There was a great silence. All nature stood waiting, while a curate tried to conceal his thoughts, not only from nature, but from himself. I thought of my injured pride, of my baffled unselfishness, of Emily, whom I was losing through no fault of her own, of the little friend, who just then slipped beneath the heavy tea-basket, and that decided me, and I laughed.

That evening, for the first time, I heard the chalk downs singing to each other across the valleys, as they often do when the air is quiet and they have had a comfortable day. From my study window I could see the sunlit figure of the faun, sitting before the beech copse as a man sits before his house. And as night came on I knew for certain that not only was he asleep, but that the hills and woods were asleep also. The stream, of course, never slept, any more than it ever freezes. Indeed, the hour of darkness is really the hour of water, which has been somewhat stifled all day by the great pulsings of the land. That is why you can feel it and hear it from a greater distance in the night, and why a bathe after sundown is the most wonderful.

The joy of that first evening is still clear in my memory, in spite of all the happy years that have followed. I remember it when I ascend my pulpit—I have a living now—and look down upon the best people sitting beneath me, pew after pew, generous and contented, upon the worse people, crowded in the aisles; upon the whiskered tenors of the choir, and the high-browed curates, and the churchwardens fingering their bags, and the supercilious vergers, who turn late comers from the door. I remember it also when I sit in my comfortable bachelor rectory, amidst the carpet slippers that good young ladies have worked for me, and the oak brackets that have been carved for me by good young men, amidst my phalanx of presentation teapots and my illuminated testimonials, and all the other offerings of people who believe that I have given them a helping hand, and who really have helped me out of the mire themselves. And though I try to communicate that joy to others—as I try to communicate anything else that seems good—and though I sometimes succeed, yet I can tell no one exactly how it came to me. For if I breathed one word of that, my present life, so agreeable and profitable, would come to an end, my congregation would depart, and so should I, and instead of being an asset to my parish, I might find myself an expense to the nation. Therefore, in place of the lyrical and rhetorical treatment, so suitable to the subject, so congenial to my profession, I have been forced to use the unworthy medium of a narrative, and to delude you by declaring that this is a short story, suitable for reading in the train.

Original from

THE SIBYL OF VENICE.

BY RACHEL SWETE MACNAMARA.

I. THE RED QUEEN.

HERE is the pack of cards of a witch—a veritable "Strega" of Venice, whose mother before her had practised the magic arts and taught them to Pia la Strega when she was but eleven years old. Choose which you will. The one you draw will tell of spell or rune, of love or hate, of the fierce primitive passions of the South. You draw. It is a Red Queen. Let it tell you the story of Frammetta of the ruddy locks and the pale Rosina.

. . . . .

"Canst thou make me beautiful in a week?" There was a note of entreaty as well as insolence in the tone of the girl who asked the question.

Pia la Strega looked up from the collar of Venetian point lace which her skilful needle was swiftly fashioning for the wear of a duchess.

The girl stood hesitating on the threshold, her slight figure, with its pale face crowned with masses of fair hair, framed in the heavy jamb of the doorway.

"I am a maker of lace," Pia answered. "Come in and shut the door behind thee, and tell me if that is what thou requirest to make thee beautiful"

The girl wavered: then with a visible effort shook off her hesitation, entered, and shut the clamped door behind her. It closed noiselessly except for a soft click of the lock, which alarmed the girl more than a loud sound would have done. Afterwards she found that this was a feature of the little *appartimento* in the corner house of the Campo San Tomaso; the walls might have ears and the windows eyes, but the doors had not tongues. Pia la Strega had a wide knowledge of character and temperament, and she well knew the value of silence in dealing with the ignorant.

The room in which the pale girl stood had nothing of the mysterious or occult in it. It was spotlessly clean, and scantily furnished; there were gay scarlet geraniums in the windows. In the little den underneath, Gianni the hunchback plied his trade of coppersmith, and in Pia's room one could hear the muffled sound of his intermittent tapping. It was he who had supplied her with the copper cooking utensils hanging on the wall, whose burnished brilliance added another touch of colour to the room. A dull blue bowl full of macaroni stood on the table, while another held lettuces, little onions, and other ingredients for a salad. All was simple, neat, and homely. Stay, there were two things which one would not find in the ordinary Venetian lace-maker's *camerino*. Item one: on either side of where the charcoal brazier stood, was a heavy clamped door, shut and silent—guarding who knew what of mystery and magic. Item two: a Swiss cuckoo clock with pine-cone weights, which hung between the two doors, and had been presented to Pia la Strega by a client to whom she had given a very successful love-potion.

At this instant the tiny door of the clock opened, the cuckoo emerged, called the half hour, and disappeared. The girl started.

"*Maria Santissima!* What was that?" she cried.

Pia la Strega looked under her eyelashes at the girl and smiled faintly. She too was, like her room, neat and homely—a figure of medium height clad in black, whose once raven hair was now thickly streaked with grey and twisted in a coil on top of her head. Her skin was brown and somewhat wrinkled, her mouth was inscrutable, and her heavy lids were like the doors of the *camerino*—they veiled the secret of her power until she chose to reveal it. Half seen through her thick eyelashes, her eyes looked cold and dead. Few had seen them otherwise. "The cold eyes of the witch," people said. But none who had ever seen the gradual transformation from death to life—from ice to fire—forgot the sight to their dying day. It was an inner light which began as a spark, and gradually grew till the flame transfigured her whole face, like a light seen through alabaster.

"What was that?" asked the girl again.

Her tone was sullen now, and she looked in frightened fashion about the room.

"Sit down," Pia commanded. "That was my little angel—the little angel who lives in the clock and tells me everything. He peeped out just now to have a look at thee."

"In the clock? Thou mockest! I will not stay here to be mocked."

"Away with thee, then. I am busy. I must finish this collar before the end of the week. If thou dost not want lace——"

"Thou knowest well it is not lace I want. Lace is for fine ladies, not for poor girls such as I. I want to be made beautiful."

"There is a man in it, then."

The girl flushed, and gave her head a little toss. "Yes, there is a man in it, of a certainty, but not in the way thou meanest."

Pia shot a contemptuous glance at her. "How shouldst thou know what such as I mean?" The girl was sitting upon a stool opposite her, and Pia leant across and caught her by the wrist, speaking rapidly and in lowered tones. "Beat thyself upon the cheek, thou! Who spoke of lovers? Is there not a Signor Americano, a painter, who wants beautiful girls for models? Is not that why thou wishest to become beautiful?"

Again the girl flushed. She tried to draw away her hand, but Pia held it in a grip of iron.

"It is true—no?"

"It *is* true, true as the Gospel. But—but who told thee, Monna Pia?"

Pia smiled. "My little angel in the clock, without doubt. Come, it is useless to try to conceal anything from me. I must know all before I can help thee."

"There is little to tell. The Signor Americano paints all the day long. He makes sketches of this and that—an old cobbler, a rusty iron doorway with slimy steps, a little bridge with a vine on it—and God knows what. He is mad, without doubt, he has grasshoppers in the head, but he is made of money. All these Americans are. He is going to paint a great picture in a few weeks, they say, and he wants for it a beautiful girl with golden hair. I am a girl with fair hair, but I am not beautiful. If I were, why not I as soon as another? They say that thou art——" she hesitated, and changed the form of her sentence. "They say that thou canst work spells. Hast thou a spell which will make me beautiful?"

Pia la Strega looked well at the girl. Her features were fairly good, and her eyes were grey and large, but her mouth, though full, had a pale, mean look about it. Pia sat for a long time, chin on hand. When she spoke again her voice was grave.

"I can do it," she said at last, "but it is a dangerous thing, and there is a price to pay."

"I will pay anything—anything," the girl cried, "if thou wilt make me more beautiful than——" She stopped abruptly, as if, in her excitement, the pale lips had said too much. "Of a certainty, when I say that I will pay anything, I mean anything in reason."

Now that there was a prospect of obtaining her heart's desire, her native caution began to reassert itself.

"I do not bargain," answered Pia, with a shrug of her shoulders. "Accept my terms or leave them—it is one and the same to me."

"But thou hast not told me thy terms," said the girl, rising and going to a little mirror which hung on the wall to rearrange her hair, which had fallen loose. Her black shawl fell from her shoulders to the floor, where it lay like a splash of ink, its long knotted fringe making ragged shadows. As she lifted her arms to pile the golden twists above her pale face, Pia's eyes were caught by a gleam of scarlet round her waist. It was a gondolier's sash, of particularly beautiful colour and texture.

"My terms," she said carelessly, "are seven lire, and—that."

She pointed to the sash as she spoke, and the girl glanced downwards.

"Seven lire! *Madre di Dio!* Who am I to rob?"

"I care not. I have told thee my price. Give it to me or go."

"Thou art hard as a millstone, of a truth," grumbled the girl, "but I suppose I must give thee the seven good lire."

"It were better than to give me seven bad ones," returned Pia calmly.

The girl moved uneasily, for the Italians say of an ingrate that he is one who pays with bad money, and Pia's words hit home. In truth, seven lire was a ridiculously small price to pay for such a boon as she was about to receive, and well she knew it.

"Give me the charm," she said, "and let me go."

"First pay me."

"What a suspicious one thou art!" the girl returned, fumbling at her waist for a little bag from which she grudgingly extracted the seven lire, and placed them in Pia's hand. "Now give me the charm."

"Not till I am paid in full."

"In full? Usurer! What of my seven shining lire?"

Pia pointed silently to her waist.

"I will not give thee my sash. It is a beautiful sash! It is a sash fit for a *festa*!"

"Take thy paltry lire, then, and go! Never let me see thy face again, lest I blast thee where thou standest."

The girl shuddered, but still defied her.

"Thou couldst not. It is only the good God who could do such a thing."

Pia raised her eyes, and looked the girl full in the face. Her eyes held the light grey ones, and it seemed to the girl as if they looked down into her mean soul. She could not remove her gaze: those terrible eyes drew and held her, and she felt that if Pia willed they could hold her through eternity. The ticking of the clock and tapping of the coppersmith beat like hammers upon her brain. Thud, thud—thud, thud—thud, thud—through a grey cloud pierced by two burning suns. Saints and angels! would it ever end?

The cloud blotted out the suns, and there was a merciful darkness for a moment. Then she found herself sitting on the stool in the window, with her head among the geranium pots, crying as if her heart would break.

Pia had turned towards the right-hand door, and, twisting the handle in a peculiar way, opened it and entered the *camerino* beyond, closing the heavy door behind her with that terrifying noiselessness.

It seemed to the girl that she had been gone a long time, and, calmed as before by the familiar aspect of the room, she forgot her former fright and began to cast curious looks about her.

Nothing on the little table beside the vegetables, the blue bowls, and the common flasks of oil and vinegar—but beyond it, the other door. Moved by an irresistible spirit of curiosity she crossed the room with catlike tread, and tried the iron handle. It was immovable: not all the pressure she dare exert could cause it even to turn.

While her hand was still upon it a noise from behind the door sounded almost in her ear. It was half sigh, half moan, indescribably weird and terrifying to one whose nerves were strung up to such a pitch. At the same instant there was a little whirr, and a phantom voice above her head sang "Cuckoo! cuckoo!" till the whole room seemed filled with the soft clamour.

With a shriek she fled back to the stool in the window, and stopped her ears with her fingers. It was thus Pia found her a moment later, when she entered the room with a tiny packet in her hand, wrapped in a piece of goatskin, and tied with scarlet threads.

"The *angiolino* has been frightening thee, I see," she said with a malicious smile. "It is ever thus when one seeks to pry into the concerns of others."

The girl said nothing, but began to unbind the gay scarf from about her waist.

"Here is the charm. It is a white powder. There is a new moon to-day." Pia's voice grew lower, and she fixed the girl with her cold eyes. "When the moon rises each night, open thy window and let her rays bathe thee. Then swallow as much of this powder as would fit on the fourth part of a centesimo—no more, as thou valuest thy life—and before the moon wanes thou wilt be beautiful. Rosy cheeks, rounded chin, red lips, sparkling eyes—that is a good bargain to get for seven bits of dross and a paltry piece of silk, *non è vero*? Now go, and remember that when thou camest here, thou didst well to leave thy tongue at home."

The girl snatched the piece of goatskin from her hand without a word of thanks, and went to the door. To her surprise and terror she could not open it.

Pia watched her efforts with a grim smile. "It is easy to get into the cage, little bird. It is not so easy to get out."

The girl beat upon the door with her hands. "Let me go! let me go!" she cried,

"Go then, fool," said Pia, opening the door with a sudden twist of the handle. "Never did I deal with such an ingrate as thou!"

The girl darted out of the room, and

rushed down the narrow entry that led to the steps into the *campo*.

Scarcely had the sound of her heels died away when Pia caught up the stool and with it gave three double taps upon the floor. Instantly Gianni's hammering ceased. She went into the room where she had procured the powder. It was a tiny *camerino* with one barred window which looked out on the sluggish green water of the *rio* flowing slowly below. There was no furniture except two rough wooden stools, a small table, just the size of forty playing-cards spread out together, a charcoal brazier, and a heavy wooden coffer clamped with iron, standing upon legs fashioned of roughly carved serpents. There was a crystal on the table, and bunches of dried herbs hung on the wall, which gave a strange aromatic perfume to the air. At the opposite end of the room was another door, at which now sounded the low double rap repeated thrice—an echo of the one Pia had given upon the floor but a moment since.

She opened the door. Gianni the Gobbo stood outside. Behind him a flight of stone steps led down to a rusty iron gate opening on to the *rio*, halfway down which was the entrance to the coppersmith's dark little den.

Gianni was a whimsical fellow, with a pair of wistful dark eyes set in a brown monkey face. Pia had shown him many a kindness, put him in the way of many a bit of business, given him many a good meal. He was not one to "pay with bad money"; he was grateful to the Strega, and showed his gratitude in ways which were invaluable to one of her calling. Who but Gianni the Gobbo could flit in and out of every gathering, picking up scraps of information here and there? A bit of gossip on the Riva, a whisper from a passing gondola, a hint let fall in the wineshop—who could hear them but Gianni of the sharp ears, who piece them together but Gianni of the sharp wits? When the girls chattered round the well in the evenings, or clustered on the steps by the canal, with heads nodding and tongues wagging like aspen leaves, who but Gianni could steal among them unrebuked, snatching a kiss here and there by way of pretext, and earning a light cuff which only pleasantly tickled his ears?

"Thou sawest that one who has just gone?" said Pia.

Gianni nodded.

"Find out for me who she is and all about her. She is not of this *campo*, nor of this quarter."

"Shalt know to-night," he said.

"Then, *angiolino mio*, thou shalt have a salad for thy supper fit for any prince. Go down our little staircase now, and let me hear the hammer once again." She held the door open for him. "Ah, if these stones could but speak!"

"Like me, they leave their tongues at home," said the Gobbo with a grin, as he vanished down the steps.

Pia went back to the outer room. The girl's sash lay across the chair like a scarlet flame. Pia caught it up and gazed at it hungrily, while a look of renewed youth came into her face. She kissed the rosy folds passionately.

"*Dio mio!* The dead days! the dead days!" she cried. Then with a lighter tread she crossed the room, twisted the handle of the left-hand door, and entered, shutting it softly behind her.

. . . . .

The Campo San Tomaso, where Pia la Strega lived, had one peculiar feature. Like all the other *campi* in Venice the little square was bordered on three sides by houses, and on the fourth by one of the lesser canals, or *rii*. But whereas in most other cases a bridge would have crossed the *rio* at this point, further progress was debarred by its absence; a railing ran along the pavement by the canal, broken in the centre by a flight of three or four steps leading down to the water. Here in the summer evenings the women sat and gossiped, while the younger ones clustered round the old well-head with its sculptured lions, and the children screamed at their play like the swifts circling in the blue above.

The house in which Pia lived was a low-browed one crushed into the corner near the *rio*. There was no traffic down the little *rio*; few gondolas passed that way, and those who went by never gave more than a glance to the rusty iron doorway over the water, nor did they notice that the hinges were well oiled, and that the centre of the bars was less rusty than elsewhere, telling a tale of frequent openings. Those who preferred secrecy came to Pia by night down the silent waterway.

The only other dwellers in the corner

"Pia passed them alternately through the vapour with a strange rhythmic movement."

house were Fiammetta and her mother, who lived on the roof. Fiammetta was a lovely creature, with skin of cream and roses, pouting laughter-loving lips, and great velvety brown eyes. But her crowning glory was her hair. It was the true Venetian hair which Titian loved so well; it grew and waved and rippled in masses of glorious ruddy gold, and she spent hours on the roof, sunning it and brushing it. But it was Pia who told her of the methods of the Venetian ladies of old—how they used to spread their tresses on sheets of copper in order to obtain the tint that was so much admired; it was Pia who got Gianni to make the sheets of copper for Fiammetta, and who compounded essences to whiten her skin. Therefore there was an *entente cordiale* between all the dwellers in the corner house.

Of Fiammetta's mother, the less said the better. She was an evil old crone, with a yellow wrinkled face—aged before her time, like all the Italian lower class women—who hoped to make money out of her daughter's beauty.

As Pia sat working at her lace in the doorway that evening, Gianni the Gobbo came out of his little shop underneath.

"I was just about to bring thee thy waterpot, mother," he said, mounting the steps with his crablike gait.

When he got nearer he lowered his voice. "Her name is Rosina, and her father is a cobbler in the Calle Stupenda," he murmured. "None of the girls like her. They laugh at her when they gossip round the well in the morning, and say she will never get a lover."

"Has she a special spite against anyone?"

"Nay, that I know not."

"Find out, then, *folletino mio*, and I will make thee a *frittura* that shall melt in thy mouth."

Gianni laughed, and retreated into the darkness.

With other clients and pressing daily needs Pia soon forgot the pale Rosina who had desired to be made beautiful. One evening at nightfall as she was working busily by the light of a little hand-lamp she heard a hesitating knock at the door.

"Come in," she called hastily. The handle turned, and who should enter but Rosina? At first Pia did not recognise her. Even yet her own friends did not fail to marvel at the transformation of the pale anæmic girl into the plump rosy-cheeked beauty who stood before her. The miracle Pia had promised had been performed, and the seven much-grudged lire had bought the world's priceless boon.

"It is thou, then," said the older woman at last.

"It is I," answered the girl, with a little self-conscious laugh.

"Hast thou come to demand thy lire back again? Or does thy mirror speak truth to thee?"

To Pia's surprise the girl fell on her knees before her, pouring forth a torrent of eager words, clutching at her hands passionately.

"Thou hast given me much, and yet I am not satisfied. I am beautiful now—I know it. My mirror tells it to me: the envious glances of the girls at the well tell it to me: I can read it in the eyes of the men as I walk along the Riva in my new black shawl with the long fringe." Her voice took on a note of pleased vanity, but some memory broke across it once again, and the hungry tones went on: "The Signor Americano paints me; he pays well, that Signor. He has holes in his hands through which the money flows. Not to me alone, thou knowest, Madonna Pia—to the others; only a little to me. But he has not yet decided to put me in his grand picture. He will not decide. There are others; there is another." Her voice lowered unpleasantly and her eyes narrowed to mere slits. "Give me, give me, I pray thee, a spell to work harm to another—a spell that will cause her colour to fade, her cheeks to sink in, her eyes to lose their light, her hair to fall out, tress by tress, until she is bald—bald as an egg." Her features worked: her face was horrible to look at in its evil distortion.

Pia shook her head.

"Nay, but thou must. I must have it, Monna Pia. I will pay thee well. I will give thee five, seven—nay, even ten lire. I will give thee ten lire, Monna Pia, if thou wilt give me a charm to work ill to one whom I hate."

Pia rose to her feet. She seemed to tower above the kneeling form.

"So the passion of hate is stronger than the desire for beauty, Rosina?"

"I will give thee ten lire—ten lire—ten lire," the girl mumbled.

As a rule Pia did not like giving spells

which worked harm, but times were hard —she was a poor woman; ten lire was ten lire—she shrugged her shoulders.

"One must live," she said; "but a word of warning I will give thee. It is ill to meddle with other women. The evil may recoil on thine own head. Let her alone and go thy ways. If the Signor Americano will not paint thee, another will. These artists are as thick as flies in Venice—they are as the grains of sand on the Lido. Be warned by me. I see it in thy fate. It will be better for thee to let this woman alone."

"Go preach to the desert," cried the girl insolently. "Here are the ten lire. I pay thee for thy charm, not for thine advice."

Pia made a gesture with her right hand, as if dismissing the subject.

"I might have known," she murmured. "The wolf may change his skin, but not his teeth."

She went to the table in the window and pulled out a drawer, from which she took a small green lemon and an ebony box full of black pins. She set the lemon sideways on the table, and with rapidly moving lips repeated some incantation thrice in a low, hollow voice.

Then she slowly counted out thirteen pins, with a muttered word for each. These pins she stuck into the lemon in a strange, fantastic pattern. "Send this to the person you wish to injure," she said. "It is a strong charm. It scarcely ever fails."

Rosina took it in her usual grumbling fashion. "Ten lire for a lemon and a few pins! I could buy a hundred in the market for such a price."

"Give it back to me, then."

She drew away her hand, and slipped the lemon into the bosom of her dress. "No, no. What I have paid for I will keep."

"Take care, lest thou pay a higher price than mere money. Remember my warning."

"Thou croakest like a frog, mother of evil," said Rosina with a disagreeable laugh. "I have got my beauty, and if thou art not a liar and a cheat she whom I hate will soon have none."

She slipped out through the door stealthily, but this time the tapping of her heels only sounded down the stone steps. When she got to the bottom she stole softly along the pavement for a few paces, and then crept farther into the shadows—a deeper shade than they.

The moon shone full into the centre of the *campo*, throwing the nuns' heads on the well into bold relief, and making the shadows cast by the houses blacker than velvet in contrast. It was the hour of the evening meal, and the little square was deserted. From the open doorways came the subdued noise of voices, faint yet cheery; the smell of frying came to Rosina's nostrils, bringing a sense of hunger; the orange squares of lamplit windows glowed cheerily from every house, but still she watched and waited.

In her room in the corner house Pia la Strega watched and waited too. She had set her door ajar so that none could pass in or out without her knowledge.

Presently a light footstep sounded on the stairs, and Pia took up her hand lamp and went out into the passage, meeting Fiammetta face to face.

"It is thou, then, Fiammetta," she said carelessly, while her eye took in every detail of the girl's appearance. "How fine thou art to night! Art going to the Piazzetta to hear the band play?"

The girl blushed rosily. In all Venice it would have been hard to find a prettier creature than Fiammetta, as she stood in the dark passage with the rays of the lamp full upon her. Her hair was piled in ruddy masses on her head and fastened with great gold pins. She wore a pale green skirt, and her black shawl had slipped aside, revealing a white bodice and a whiter throat with a string of green Venetian beads clasped round it.

"It is useless to hide aught from thee, *mia vecchia*," she said affectionately. "Thou hast guessed it. I am to sup at Zorzi's first, and then—and then the band." Her eyes sparkled with delight at the prospect. She looked radiantly lovely.

"I, too, was once young," said Pia, "but I would beg of thee to have a care, Fiammetta. I know these painting *signori*. It is a kiss to-day and '*addio*' to-morrow, and no more thought of it. But the girl remembers, and sometimes to her cost."

Fiammetta laughed and blew a kiss to the grave warning face. "Who said aught of painters?" she cried, as she ran down the steps. "I am too wise a pigeon to be caught easily."

"Take care, my little pigeon, that thou

dost not get thy wings clipped," said Pia, looking after her.

The watcher in the darkness laughed to herself. "Aye, thy wings shall be clipped—clipped till thou fallest to the ground!" she murmured, as she crept along in the shadow until she came to the railings by the water's edge. Into the moonlight she dared not go, but she was near enough for her purpose. Her heart gave a great leap as a gondola glided silently past her, its little lamp gleaming like a golden firefly through the dark. The heavy steel prow flashed as it shot suddenly into the moonlight and drew up at the steps where Fiammetta waited.

Rosina caught her breath as she saw a figure rise from the seat of the gondola and help Fiammetta in; she heard a murmur of "*bellissima*," "*carissima*," or some soft superlative. Then the gondola shot away into the darkness, and Rosina was left alone with her evil thoughts—the waters of the *rio* lapping suggestively at her feet, and the melancholy "*stali*" of the gondolier returning to her out of the distance like an echo of her own lost hopes.

That night Pia was still up when Fiammetta returned.

The girl put her head in at the open doorway. "Ha! my old night-bird!" she gaily cried. "Watchest thou for thy little pigeon? All goes well, Pia *mia*. He is to paint me in his great picture! He is to make me famous. I shall be rich as the Jews. But best of all—oh, best of the bests!—I shall see him every day, *vecchia mia*! Think of that!"

She ran away laughing, but Pia's sharp eyes had caught the glitter of a ring, and she went to bed with a heavy heart, for she liked the girl well.

In the morning Fiammetta came to her again. Her hair was unbound, for she had just been giving it the morning sun-bath on the sheets of copper, and it hung in rippling masses below her knees. In her hand she held a small object which she regarded with fear and suspicion. It was a lemon stuck with thirteen black pins.

Pia recognised it before she spoke. "Where didst thou get that?" she asked sharply.

"From Netta, the fruit-seller's daughter. It was wrapped in a piece of torn newspaper. She said a little girl gave it to her this morning, and told her to give it to Fiammetta of the ruddy locks. It came from a well-wisher, she said."

"*Ma che!* she spells well-wisher differently from *my* way," Pia answered. "This is the work of an enemy, my child. It is a very strong charm to work thee evil."

All the colour faded from the girl's cheeks, and her eyes had a frightened look. "But thou wilt help me, Pia?" she said coaxingly, laying her hand on the Strega's arm. "Thou art stronger than this evil one—a bad Easter to her!"

"Give me the lemon," Pia commanded, "and I will see what I can do. Come into the inner *camerino*, Fiammetta, and shut the door after thee. This is no affair for prying eyes."

Can a witch possess a conscience? If so, Pia's did not prick her in the least at the thought of working against her own spells. The only salve her sense of justice recommended was that Fiammetta should pay more than Rosina had done. The thought tickled her sense of humour as well, and she smiled as she unlocked the coffer with the twisted snakes.

Out of a scented sandalwood box she took certain objects, which she laid on the little table in the corner. Then she took from the wall some sprigs of dried vervain which she tied together with bits of red wool, until she had made three rough little crosses.

"Here," she said, "are three crosses which thou must fasten to the head of thy bed when the moon is at its full to-night. They will keep the spirits of evil from thee at night. And here, in this red woollen bag, is a very strong charm to keep the spirits of evil from thee by day. But first I must light the brazier, and pass them through the vapour."

Fiammetta watched her with childlike interest while she lit the charcoal and fanned it with a palm-leaf fan until it shone with a clear red glow. Then from the coffer she took a curiously shaped phial of cloudy Venetian glass, which held an opaque orange liquid that bubbled when her movements shook it. With her free hand she waved Fiammetta into the corner, and poured three drops of the liquid upon the brazier. Where each drop had fallen a blue spiral of smoke rose instantly to the ceiling. Pia replaced the phial in the coffer, and taking the

three crosses in one hand and the little red bag in the other, she passed them alternately through the vapour with a strange rhythmic movement, crooning to its measure.

"Repeat the words after me," she said without turning her head, and Fiammetta repeated as well as she could follow:

First with three spirat vapours I remove
All evil influence, and I humbly pray
That thou will take it all away from me,
And send it all to my worst enemy!

When the evil fortune
Is taken from me,
I'll cast it out into the middle of the street,
And leave it for mine enemy to gather!

Fiammetta repeated the words with gusto, and thought of Rosina when her enemy was mentioned. Thrice the incantation was repeated. Then Pia blew upon the vapours, and they vanished. Fiammetta gasped with astonishment.

"They went out like the flame of a candle," she said.

"Keep a still tongue," counselled Pia. "It is ill to talk of what thou seest in the witch's *camerino*. Here in this bag are three horse-chestnuts which came out of one shell, a sprig of vervain, and a sprig of rue. Wear it over thy heart and no ill can befall thee."

"All the blessings within the walls of the world be thine!" cried Fiammetta, taking the crosses and the little bag, round which a subtle Eastern perfume clung. "Canst do nought for nought, as I know well. Will this pay thee?" She pressed a gold coin into Pia's hand. "Luckily I did not give it all to the *Mamma* last night."

Pia glanced at the good gold. It represented a small fortune to her. "Ah, thou art a generous one!" she said. "Thou hast holes in thy hands, my little pigeon. It is indeed enough."

"It is nothing," returned Fiammetta carelessly. "The Signor will give me much more before the picture is finished."

She had regained her old jauntiness of demeanour, and smiled once more on a world which had never frowned at her.

"Mark what I said," warned Pia, as she left her.

"Art as bad as the priests, *vecchia mia*!" laughed the girl saucily.

Scarcely had Pia settled herself once more to her lace when a tap came at the door, followed immediately by the entrance of Gianni.

"I have news for thee," he said. "It is our Fiammetta whom Rosina hates. I watched her last night spying upon the girl and the Signor Americano."

'Thy news was in last week's *Giornale*, my Gobbo," said Pia calmly. "Thou criest 'Stay thy hand' when the eggs are broken!"

Gianni the Gobbo wrinkled up his monkey face, and retired crestfallen.

"Perhaps *all* the eggs are not broken, *folletto mio*," Pia called after him. "There may be enough left to make one omelet for thee."

It was common chatter now at the well-head or the fountain how Rosina of the Calle hated Fiammetta of the Campo. True, the Signor Americano made use of Rosina for his sketches, but it was Fiammetta whom he was to paint in his big picture—just Fiammetta in ordinary dress, in her pale green skirt, and the green beads round her white throat. *Già!* what a notion!

Wherever one went the other dogged her footsteps. Whether strolling on the Riva, gossiping at the water's edge, walking in the Piazzetta, praying at San Marco, or listening to the band in the evening, Rosina followed Fiammetta like a shadow. Day by day her hatred grew. It possessed her like an evil spirit: it tormented her dreams—it haunted her waking hours. It embittered the bread she ate, the wine she drank: she grew pale, thin, and wore a haunted look. Pia's prophecy had come true: the evil she planned had recoiled upon herself. Oh for courage to stick a knife in that soft white bosom—to leave witch-spells alone, and burn, sear, deface that radiant beauty with vitriol which never fails!

But Fiammetta was always surrounded with people, and there were difficulties in the way of buying vitriol. She must bide her time, and seize the opportunity. If even she could feel her fingers about that rounded throat!—her hatred grew with what it fed upon.

Time waits not for enemies or lovers, and one starlit evening Gianni the Gobbo came to Pia with his tongue in his cheek. He had not volunteered any information since his rebuff of three weeks ago.

"What price for last week's *Giornale* Monna Pia?" he asked saucily.

"What meanest thou, goblin?"

"I thought all things were known to thee before they happened"

"One thing is known to me before it happens, and that is that thou wilt get thine ears well cuffed."

Gianni dodged her with the quickness of long practice, and sat on the stool by her side—his grotesque face puckered to a droll earnestness.

"Then thou knowest not, of a verity, for I myself have but just seen it."

"Cease thy jesting, and tell me what thou hast seen."

"Rosina's dead body taken out of the canal."

"*Già*, the foolish one! She cannot say I did not warn her," was all Pia said.

"She went to the painter's, where Fiammetta had gone this morning Monna Pia—the house was empty! She had gone! Our Fiammetta has gone away with the Signor Americano."

"*Dio mio!*"

"Then, poor Rosina, she went in a madness. The picture was there. She had a flask of vitriol in her pocket: she dashed it at the painted face and fled—screaming horribly, a woman told me. Then the canal,—and then——" He stopped with an expressive gesture.

"She will have to pay in Purgatory," Pia said "Learn this, my Gobbo—that not all the magic in the world is stronger than a woman's love."

She folded up her lace and went into the room at the left side, whose threshold no foot ever crossed but her own.

"She ought to know," mused the hunchback, following her with his eyes.

IN THE BUCH-HEIDE.

HERE, where the golden shafts of sunlight fall,
Piercing the forest gloom with dying flame,
As once the glittering might of heaven came
To illumine Semele through her prison wall,
Here, where the beech-trees turn to gold 'mid all
The blood-red splendour of their fallen leaves—
I sit and dream the tales that Fancy weaves,
While birds pour forth their sweet voiced madrigal.
Red, yellow, gold, and nut-brown: all are here,
The ever changing moods of sylvan will;
Here, through the spear-like columns of the glade,
Gleam scarlet rowans 'neath the pines' black shade.
Ah, God! if only autumn could stand still,
With all the ruined glory of the year!

PHILIP S. F. NAIRN.

'As I stepped on the landing she flung her arms round me declaring I should not go thus. She had her child with her'"

Headpiece by Edgar Wilson.

BY W. SMADE.

ILLUSTRATED BY H. M. PAGET

I.

THE road from Cirencester to Minchinhampton across a wind-swept plateau is one of the highest in the Midlands, and Christmas Eve 1760 was a night long remembered by the gaffers and gammers of the district.

Snow had fallen with weird silence all day, and as night approached two horsemen might have been seen making their way through it with a steady persistency.

The pair were dressed with exact similarity. Long cloaks with many capes enveloped them, and they wore large jack boots and swords. Their cocked hats, each ornamented with a cockade of stamped leather, pointed them out as men in the King's service, while an enormous horse-pistol thrust into each holster appeared to indicate an errand of danger.

"What's the job to-night?" asked the younger man of the two.

"Search warrant for 'The Ragged Cot,'" answered the other gruffly.

"What's wanted?"

"Brandies and 'bacca as usual, but we are to look out for silks and shineys."

"They tell me 'The Ragged Cot' is used by gentlemen of the road."

"Aye! Used to be. Been shut up of late."

"Why's that?"

"Something queer, I reckon. No one seems to know, for sartin. Bill Clavers is a sly buck. Been a gentleman once, they tell me, and fought for Charley in the '45. Got broke, and took to the landlord business, and did jobs for his pals, who are mostly gentlemen of the road or smugglers. Every man has to get a living somehow."

"But if the place is shut up where's the use of all this?"

"'Tain't quite shut. That's what we wants to learn about. There's a light some nights in a window. It's got to be cleared up. If he's hiding we've got to find out why."

"Will he ruffle, think ye?"

"Aye, most like. He's game, I tell 'ee. We'll have to have our peepers open and our barkers ready."

"Any woman in it?"

"Don't know. He used to have a wife and child. But no one's seen anything of them for nearly a month now."

"Is he still living there, then?"

"Don't know. P'raps. If so he goes about at night—nobody ain't seen nothing of him by day. We're there now. That's 'The Ragged Cot' against the sky.

Highest point of the road before it turns down to Minchinhampton. We'll get off and hitch the 'osses behind the bushes. Now give me the lamp and a quarter of 'our's start to look about a bit, and then meet me at the front door with the bag o' tools."

Waiting the prescribed time, the yoonger followed, and strode deliberately to the front door, where he was immediately joined by his comrade

"He's here, or some one else," he whispered hoarsely. "There's a light in the attic at the back. Now stand back in the shadow and get your barkers out, and keep your eyes on the windows while I knock him up. I don't want to have daylight let into me till I've finished the job."

The junior obeyed.

"Open in the King's name!" the leader called, knocking loudly.

But a third summons brought no response.

"Hand up the bag," said he in a determined voice. "We means to get in. I've got a warrant on me and instructions. Keep your pistols ready, lad, while I force open the winder."

The man was an experienced hand, consequently not many minutes elapsed before the shutter was forced open, and breaking the glass with the tool he passed his hand in and undid the latch. The rays of the lamp showed him the kitchen of the little inn.

Followed by his companion he climbed up and in. The room bore no signs of recent occupation; the grate was empty and the iron cold. No food was visible, and little furniture.

The door was locked on the outside.

With a dexterous jerk it was thrown open, when there was the report of a pistol, and a bullet whizzing past their heads shattered a plate on the dresser, which fell with a loud clatter.

The rays of the lamp showed a half-dressed man in the passage outside, with a smoking pistol in his left hand and a drawn sword in his right. In another instant the younger man, who had raised his pistol, would have replied, when the man, uttering a shriek, dropped his sword and fell on his knees, burying his face in his hands, which trembled visibly.

To the astonished officers there then appeared, moving silently along the passage and between the combatants, the white figure of a woman with a babe at her breast.

The face was pale and agonised, and the right arm was extended as if in appeal. It moved across them with fixed eyes, and passing up the staircase it vanished.

"Zounds, man!" said the elder to the young constable, whose ashen face proclaimed his terror, "buck up and arrest him. Whether woman or ghost, it's gone now."

The man was easily secured. In fact, he appeared to have sunk into a condition of apathy, and made no resistance.

The snow had ceased falling, and the clear moonlight, streaming in through the broken window, fell now upon a figure strapped to a chair. He made no struggle, but sat like one entranced.

A few kegs of brandy of a suspicious character were found, but nothing else, and they then proceeded to the bar-parlour.

The younger man threw open the door, and immediately staggered back, with white lips which with difficulty pronounced the words: "It's in there!"

The elder man, whose nerves were of a harder nature, went to the door and gazed in. The moonlight illuminated the room, and where its beams fell was a large oaken chest on which was seated the dim outline of a woman in night attire holding a babe. The figure was motionless, the eyes fixed, and there was a red patch on the temple.

The man retreated breathlessly and closed the door. Recovering himself, he strode into the kitchen and confronted his prisoner.

"Bill Clavers," he said, "who is this woman in there?"

The wretched man swayed from side to side and moaned, "It's her and the child."

The constable returned to the bar. His teeth were set

Addressing his companion, who was gulping down brandy, he said, "There's something besides smuggled goods here. I mean to look into that chest, ghost or no ghost. Come along."

Seizing the lantern, he thrust open the parlour door. It was tenantless. The moon shed its light now only on the shabby furniture.

The officers approached the chest, and wrenching off the hasp raised the lid. Lifting the lantern they gazed down into it, and, with sensations of horror, dis-

covered a body clothed only in a night-dress, while half hidden by the hair which flowed from the woman's head was the body of a little child.

They let fall the lid and left the room. The elder man turned the key in the door and dropped it into his pocket.

"William Clavers," said he, again confronting his prisoner, "I arrest you in the King's name."

II.

The beams of the setting sun were illuminating the interior of the Gloucester Assize Court, and falling upon a crowded and silent assemblage. The faces of all were silent and expectant, and their eyes were turned toward a tall and singularly handsome man who occupied the dock. His face was pale and haggard, though the well formed nose and chin denoted a parentage of higher quality than the majority of those present. He had pleaded "Not Guilty," and stoutly maintained his innocence. Although the identity of the remains found had been clearly proved by the marks on the clothing, the prosecution were unable to produce a scrap of direct evidence or to suggest any plausible theory as to motive.

The prisoner's counsel had skilfully made the most of the situation, and he was at this moment pressing it upon the court.

Was there not, he argued, a possibility of some serious fall or accident involving the mother and child simultaneously? Under the circumstances of his isolation, poverty and distress of mind, was it to be wondered at if the prisoner had become temporarily deranged, and thus impelled to act in such a way as to arouse suspicion?

Under this supposition, and in the face of the absence of evidence as to motive, was it possible for the jury to convict?

The prisoner, whose manner up till now had been coldly indifferent, assumed a more triumphant bearing, and an acquittal seemed probable.

His counsel had come to the end of his address, and was already entering upon his peroration, when the prisoner was seen to start to his feet, and with pale face and eyes staring into the darkening gloom to the right of the judge's chair, he startled the court by exclaiming, "She is here to condemn me." Falling back in the dock he became insensible.

All gazed in the same direction, and on the judge's right hand was seen a white figure of a woman with a child in her arms.

It remained but a few seconds and then vanished. The judge alone had seen nothing, and after a short adjournment until the prisoner had recovered, proceeded with his summing up.

The jury were not long absent. The incident had completely annulled the impression made by the counsel for the defence.

"Prisoner at the bar," came the measured tones of the judge, "you have been found guilty. Have you anything to say before sentence of death is pronounced?"

The prisoner made no answer, and the words of the judge were repeated to him. He looked up and around, as if in a dream. Then he straightened himself and threw back his hair, which had hung in disorder over his face. His eyes became brilliant, and in calm and musical tones which filled the whole court, he began:

"My lord, I am beholden to you. I am justly condemned: I am guilty." An indescribable sensation passed through the assembly. "But I claim a few minutes to vindicate those who can no longer speak for themselves." He paused, and looking round him his face flushed and his hands were clenched.

"You all know me. You say I was a highwayman. It is true. Better men than I gain a living thus. You say I was a smuggler. True again. You have found me a murderer. It is true. I am. Let me speak the truth as in the presence of death.

"I am a loyal subject of King Charles —God bless him!" and he raised a crucifix to his lips. "I fought for him, the rightful sovereign of this land; and for that the usurper confiscated my home and lands and turned me penniless upon the world.

"I recognise not your king, and therefore deny your laws. I was free to gain sustenance in spite of both. I treated others as I myself have been treated. I owe no man anything. I paid for everything I bought and every man who did me service.

"Last winter was hard, and I was desperate for money. I arranged with a companion who was as needy as myself

to stop and rob the Stroud mail coach and to take life if opposed.

"My wife (and he stopped to cross himself) learnt of it, and strove to dissuade me. But we were starving then. When the trysting-time arrived I went to my room to prepare. I had drunk brandy many times that day. As I stepped out on the landing she flung her arm round me declaring I should not go thus. She had her child with her. In sudden anger I thrust her from me, and she fell, down to the hall beneath. In a delirous state I fled the house and mounted.

"We stopped that coach, and took each man sixty golden guineas besides mails and jewels. I returned home late. The house was dark. I stumbled across some thing at the foot of the stairs. In sudden panic I struck a light at the bar and came back. God! my wife and child lay there both cold and dead."

The silence of the court had so far been intense, but now a murmur of horror swept across it. The prisoner resumed in a lower tone: "I have nothing more to say, my lord. The sentence which you will pronounce I shall welcome as a release from a state of torture I need not dwell upon."

Grasping his crucifix in both hands, he bowed his head and ceased.

Sentence was pronounced in the usual form.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS.

IN good old days long since gone by
Man was Creation's lord,
And in the Stone Age family
They pulled with one accord.

To keep this harmony intact
Was sometimes hard, of course,
But when politeness failed, and tact,
They had recourse to force:

For then no wife claimed equal rights;
Her husband was, perchance,
The hero of a hundred fights!—
She quailed beneath his glance.

And so to honour and obey,
As per her marriage vow,
Became her chief delight—I say!
What if that "then" were "now"!

The prehistoric man forswore
All shadow of restraint;
He wrapped himself in skins, or wore
An overcoat of paint.

He owned no laws, obeyed no king,
But roved the forest free—
A life which would be just the thing,
I'm confident, for me.

Yes, I would be a Stone Age man
With shaggy unkempt hair,
My life work trying to trepan
The bison and the bear.

With savage glee I'd slay the deer,
And roast it on my fire,
Then gorge, all undisturbed by fear
Of consequences dire.

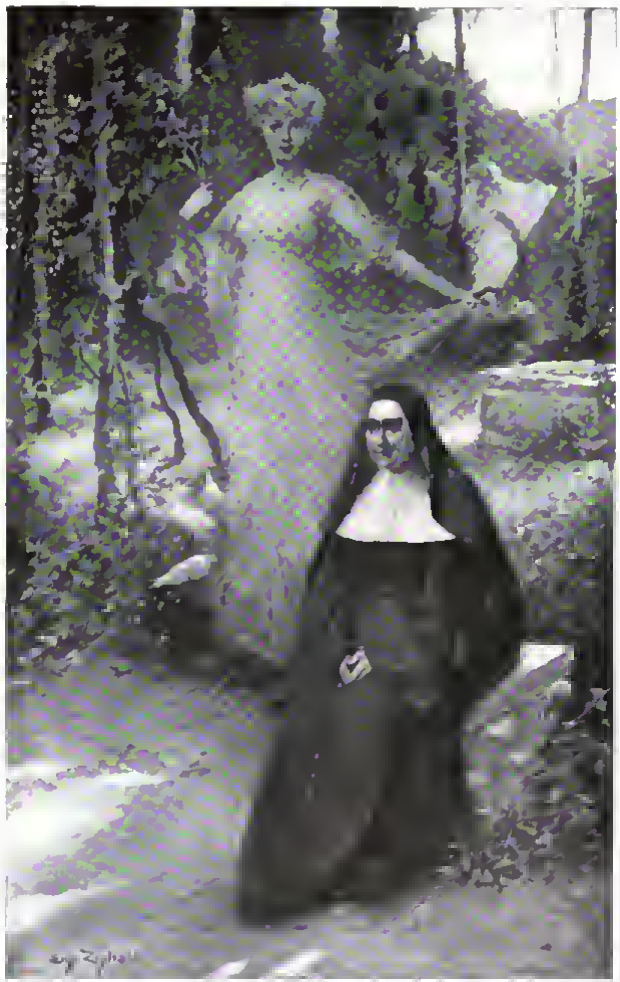
But why indulge in day-dreams when
Such things can never be?
The savage killed his dinner then—
My dinner half kills me!

And if without my overcoat
I venture up to town,
The influenza microbes gloat
And straightway hunt me down.

Yet, though I ache for days whene'er
I run to catch a train,
I fain would have, I still declare,
The good old days again.

Oh! for one day of single bliss
And that primeval life;
It would be worth a year of this—
But hush!—here comes my wife!

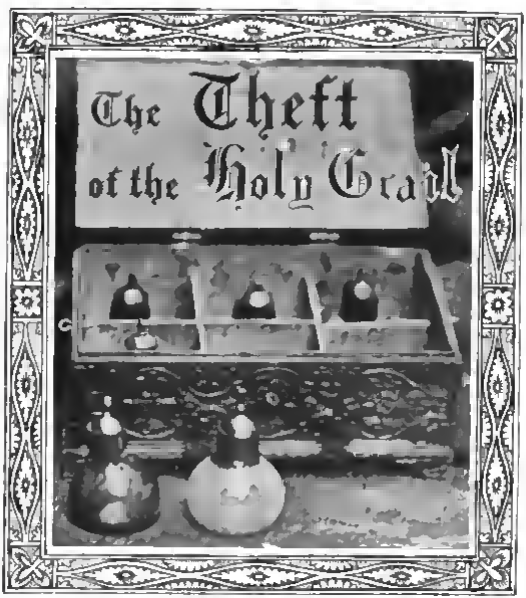
H. N. PECK.



"And often thinking of the feet whose tread has smoothed these cloister walks I remember the wan, grey figure of Eunice, telling her beads, and fancy behind her, leaning at the monastery well, a radiant and imperishable vision of Guinevere."

THE PALL MALL MAGAZINE

VOL. XLI. MARCH 1908. NO. 179.



THE THEFT OF THE HOLY GRAIL

BY WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

ILLUSTRATED BY L. ZIGLIARA.

I.

ON the morning of February 21, 1900, sitting at Professor Vanni's laboratory table at the Villa Sirena, I pushed from me, with a movement of despair, his famous Casquet of Essentials, whose contents I had been studying. That casquet—the master's tool-chest—is in my possession since my tutor's tragic death, and, re-examining its vials for the hundredth time, I am moved to write the story of an experience when, in a heedless hour, I ventured without his knowledge to apply one of its essences to a problem upon which we were engaged. Before me are its tiny flacons, filled by him with curious poisons, that in his marvellous adaptation held, not death, but life and benediction. Fastened in its lid are the compasses and rule and weights wherewith he estimated unknown quantities, and an ivory chart, on whose fine surface he traced that perspective wherein the fateful things of life begin and end.

When at Christmas he invited me to Sorrento, he met me with an exultant exclamation: "I have discovered the theory of a cleaving impetus as powerful as the finest flight of the master-mind." For some weeks thereafter we had been employed upon one of those enigmas of psychical research which seem like some sand-worm shape washed up from the deep of sunken things. A month later he had been suddenly summoned to Naples, I knew not upon what haunted errand, leaving me alone, in possession of his laboratory, where I had spent a week in fascinating study. Each afternoon I travelled farther from the evanescent things of to-day toward undiscovered outposts, and at evening, before the blazing logs, pursued those gleams that from remote ages have illuminated and perplexed the mind.

"Is it possible," I asked myself that morning, "that an amorous passion may continue between the living and the dead?"

As in that instant's discouragement I brushed aside the casquet's phantom world, the door opened, and Pasquale, our custode at the Villa Sirena, handed me a telegram from Vaini, asking me to join him immediately in Naples. It was yet early, and as my carriage sped out of Sorrento, the burnished slopes of Vesuvius were flushed as pearls that glisten in the sun. Above the mountain floated a pink film like a poised almond-flower. I remember how, looking earlier from my window, I had watched the shadows fade as the primrose tints of sunrise kindled, and had listened to the richness and variety of the music of the sea. It was a day so transcendent that its breath trembled with the fragrance of bygone yet immortal roses, and, looking beyond the luminous green, one might have deemed Vaini's alchemic art had transfigured the far horizon to a land of gold.

I found my former tutor at the house of a friend, his features reflecting from the facets of his mind that significance of a being potent upon the goal. "A fighter," Vaini was wont to say, "must possess the fighting edge," and this, through years of toil and triumph, had become traced upon his countenance. I knew at a glance that he was busy upon one of those strange problems whereof he had solved so many—that, as so often before, he had matched himself single-minded against forces vast, uncomprehended, sinister, perhaps death dealing to an intruder.

"I have sent for you," he began, "because an affair which at first seemed the application of mere ingenuity to the recovery of a stolen object has suddenly become complicated. I wish you to unravel its minor threads, leaving me to concentrate upon the others. Can I depend upon your bringing an unflagging good will?"

"Dear master," I exclaimed, "my happiest hours have been those spent in the splendid freedom of your service."

"An object," he thoughtfully observed, "renowned through Christendom, and secure of immortality hereafter, after being lost and found centuries ago, has now been lost again. You do not need to be told that I refer to the Holy Grail."

"But the Holy Grail," I interrupted, "or the emerald chalice to which that name is given, has reposed in this city since the sixteenth century, in the possession of the Cathedral of San Gennaro. It is impossible that it can have been stolen or lost."

"*Impossible!*" echoed the wise man. "Only to think that at intervals for thirty years you have had my instruction and advice, and that after profuse and varied study and experiment you have not yet learned that in this *bizarro* world things deemed impossible are continually happening. Are you better than an amateur?"

"At least, Professor," I answered, piqued by this rebuke, "my surprise is natural. I have often looked at the Holy Grail, locked in its bronze-bound crystal case, watched night and day by Ursuline nuns. Jealous eyes observed it incessantly, no one was suffered to approach within the rail, and for two hundred years none less than cardinal or king has touched it."

"Of course there was complicity among the nuns," assented Vaini, twirling the big green pencil wherewith in hours of abstraction he drew geometric tangents and ellipses which conveyed a mathematical expression of the subject before us in a language I had grown to understand.

"What interest have we," I inquired, "in the loss or recovery of that curious tazza?"

"The scientific world," he answered, speaking with Italian smoothness, "has doubted the value—even the existence—of my loftiest discoveries. So true is it that Truth is slow in coming to the front. That man may acquire new powers by the resuscitation within him of animal instinct, that the wild creature's method of returning to remote localities may be used in mental processes, that the unconscious operation whereby the brain grasps an elusive solution may be raised to a certainty, are things a decadent age calls visionary. But imagine the effect were they successfully directed to some matter-of-fact business on which public attention happened to be fastened!"

"Professor," I inquired, "what is to be my share in the work? Make it an easy task; I know so little of the technique of these things."

"Carissimo," replied the wise man, "I only ask you to apply what I have taught you of the prime movers to our occult periphery. Already I am on the trace of the guilty, a foreigner aged about fifty-five, quite bald, and, from the movement of his lips, talking very fast."

"You have seen him?" I exclaimed.

"Only in the darkness of the dust film we have used together. He is in hiding not far away, and we shall find him when my indications are perfected. To-day you will oblige me by giving your attention to a shrivelled old woman, an Ursuline nun, who was on watch the night the sacrosanto was stolen, and who knows the thief."

"How can you tell that she knows the thief?"

"Because a minute interrogatory has established the fact," rejoined the Professor, with an amused smile. "She admits having been so overcome at recognising his identity, while the theft was being committed, as to have lost all presence of mind."

"Then why not make her tell his name?"

"Companion of my studies, that is for you to do," retorted my master, the smile broadening to a good-natured little laugh. "She is Sister Eunice, of the Convent of Divine Repose, perhaps once pleasing and attractive, now old, infirm, and frightened. She is English, and you will speak her own language, which I am unable to do. While you can force nothing further from her than moaning repetitions, I doubt not that, if you take her to my Villa Sirena and give peace of mind and good cheer, you may draw forth important clues. Your afternoon is filled with ungarnered harvest. A motive must be supplied, and, as you know, the strongest motive in the human heart, and one that usually loosens the tongue, is a lust for revenge. How that motive is to be used remains for you to discover. Come with me; she is in the next room, ready to go."

"Remove a nun, however old, from the control of her superiors!"

"We have both civil and ecclesiastical authority. All Naples is longing and

expectant, and has called upon me to recover its Holy Grail Take your steps with inspiration, remembering that a woman's nature is really deep where it appears shallow. I shall expect you back in a day or two."

So saying, Vaini opened a door and motioned me into an adjoining room, where, on a reclining chair, rested an elderly woman, whose frail form was robed in the vestments of St. Ursula. She shrank before my tutor's approach, and turned upon me a countenance whereon was fixed a silent acquiescence in fate. It was the weary face of one who has suffered, and as I looked into those dark eyes I was smitten with the consciousness of an intrusion.

She answered my first words in the restrained English of the formal 'seventies, pure of the careless diction of *fin de-siècle* days. I noticed that her fingers were carelessly, and perhaps unconsciously, busy with the beads of a blackthorn rosary. During our journey I inquired of her the history of the Holy Grail, whereof I knew little. Was it of miraculous origin, or had antiquity cast about it fables of its own? Had she been privileged to hold it in her hands, and was it in very deed carved from a single emerald?

Sister Eunice answered that she had more than once washed it with perfumed water, though she had never seen it in the full light of day. It was kept in a crystal case before the altar, where the light was chiefly of consecrated tapers It was supposed to be of Babylonian cutting—a chalice sacred to Baal—and had been assigned to Pausanias as his share of the Persian plunder after Platæa. We are told that he presented it to the Delphic Temple of Apollo. Mark Antony gave it to Herod the Great, who bestowed it as a wedding gift upon the beautiful and ill-fated Mariamne.

This story was interrupted by a rasping little cough. My companion's taciturnity had yielded to the interest of our discussion, and perhaps to the pleasure of escaping from Vaini's interrogatory.

"And after that, my sister, what befell?"

"When Mariamne was put to death it was stolen by a servant, who sold it to Joseph of Arimathea. I need not remind you of its disappearance."

"No," I assented, "nor of the search for it by pilgrims and crusaders. All the world knows that it was found at Lepanto on the Turkish admiral's ship, and that Don John of Austria placed it in the Cathedral of Naples. Professor Vaini told me," I added very gently, "that you know nothing of its theft."

At these words the Ursuline nun averted her face, and gazed out upon the breadth and splendour of the scene before us.

"You are looking," I said, "towards the Roman Stabiæ, where years ago I beheld the skeleton of an ancient galley recovered from the deep and brought in to our sunshine, with its shells and tangle dripping, like the secret of a lifetime suddenly revealed!"

Sister Eunice turned and gazed at me fixedly.

"But now," I added carelessly, "we have only agreeable things to think of We are nearly at our destination, where we shall find a garden spangled with December roses, and that peace without which kings are but slaves."

Half an hour later we were sitting in Vaini's library at the Villa Sirena, the tea-things spread upon his work-table. In my ears rang his words that Sister Eunice was to be refreshed and comforted, and her secret drawn from her unawares My eyes passed from the shrivelled figure before me—from the face that through half a lifetime had not brightened in the light of home, the hands blanched in the service of others, the lips that had tasted bitter lees The small ivory box in its accustomed niche riveted my thoughts It was the Casquet of

"I must have lost consciousness, for when my eyes reopened the nun's teacup was empty and the lute-strings were trembling beneath her touch. I tried to speak, but my voice sounded strange and unnatural."

Essentials whose contents were familiar, though neither Vaini nor I had yet dared use the poisons those tiny vials contained.

An overwhelming temptation presented itself, for success meant a realisation of the ideal of science and imagination. I hesitated before a responsibility wherein a maladroitness might be followed by this woman's death. I was vividly conscious of having reached one of those fateful instants when a resolve which makes for the success or failure of a lifetime must be shrunk from or accepted.

A startling surprise interrupted my musing. On the wall hung an ivory lute of rare beauty, once in long-gone days familiar to Vaini's touch. Sister Eunice rose with emotion, caressing the instrument with loving fingers, and murmuring in a trembling voice—"*My lute!*"

It flashed across my thoughts that in sending me upon this visionary quest, the Professor had been disingenuous in concealing from me some acquaintance between himself and the Ursuline nun in days when he was not an arch-master of curious arts, nor she a recluse from the world. In the instant's irritation that followed I resolved at any hazard to fathom the half-revealed secret that had thrust itself upon me.

Sister Eunice was so intent upon the ivory lute that she did not see me empty the vial labelled "Urohæmatoporphyria Cytheræ" into her teacup. The instantaneous effect of the faint aroma reduced me to a drowsy perception that I had been thrown thirty years backward. I must have lost consciousness, for when my eyes reopened the nun's teacup was empty, and the lute-strings were trembling beneath her touch. I tried to speak, but my voice sounded strange and unnatural. She was still standing before me, but the sea air had crimsoned her wrinkled cheeks and brightened her brown eyes. The pallid face had suddenly flushed with exultant youth, and she regarded me with a girl's laugh, young and deliciously spontaneous, rippling from the immortal heart of joy.

Then, athwart the twinkling lute-strings, and from the distance of years, I heard the refrain:

> Drink to me only with thine eyes,
> And I will pledge with mine.

II

I was awakened next morning by a faint odour of hyacinths stealing through my open window—seeming the rich and lingering perfume of dreams.

Yes, dreams of that astounding transformation—of the awakened look of those intent brown eyes—eyes of pride and laughter, and wistful things unspoken and suddenly grown young. She was auburn-haired now, as though returning youth had crowned her with its transcendent halo. The nun's habit had faded in the pink folds of a gown, and an extraordinary warmth and richness and brilliancy had replaced the grey human shadow.

In that early reverie I listened to the undulating murmur of soft sounds without—the rhythm of wings and awakenings. What an awakening had been hers, as Vaini's poison fired her veins, and how with a woman's luminous flash of comprehension she had instantly accepted it, as though the flame of youth could never be wholly dead in a vestal bosom.

We had spent the evening in Vaini's library, and I remembered her shapely sentences sounding across my stupor at what I had done. At ten o'clock one of the Italian maids had shown her upstairs to a guest's chamber, whither her

nun's portmanteau had been taken. She had told me her name, Guinevere Godfree, the name of her English girlhood, Eunice being that assumed in her novitiate. Her youth had been unhappy, she added, and our talk covered an interplay of profound emotion. I was conscious as we spoke of things that burned to be said, yet remained unspoken. And now the day stood waiting poised in breathless silence, like Horus the immortal holding his secret with finger on his lips.

It was in Vaini's cloister garden that I found her, walking amid its triangles of lawn, its sky-swung clusters of oranges, its tricking splash of water amid monastic statues and the walls and arches about which age has cast its silver grey

Advancing to me with a careless gesture towards the sun dappled walls, the climbing sweet-bays and the dilapidated steps, over which a lizard darted, she exclaimed, "It has the sense of having been lovely and beloved for centuries."

"To me," I answered, "it seems younger and more exquisite than ever before."

"The night has gone," she exclaimed with emotion, "the convent night . . ."

"And the day has come. That is why everything looks suddenly beautiful to us both."

"You have saved me from the shadow and the dust," she cried, "you have given me uplifting happiness, and I have been waiting here to ask you what has happened, whether it is real——"

"Last evening," I replied, "we climbed together from darkness into light Does not the good Book say, 'Come, let us walk in the light'?"

"Light and gladness," she murmured, "how musically the words ring together!"

"It is in the light," I answered, gazing into her liquid eyes, "that flowers bloom!"

My words were cut short by the appearance of Pasquale, followed by a sinister-visaged man, dressed in official frock-coat, who Pasquale whispered was the Provincial Chief of Police.

Guinevere and I divined the purpose of this visit, and, drawn by a common danger, turned with composure towards the enemy.

"I had not expected to find so young a lady," observed the commissary, fixing his astonished eyes upon Miss Godfree.

"I had not expected the pleasure of this visit," I replied. "Will you tell me its object?"

"A sensational robbery has been committed at San Gennaro," explained the official, seating himself in the rustic chair to which I motioned "The Holy Grail has disappeared under circumstances which point to its acquisition by some millionaire crank. The nuns are suspected of connivance, and one of them, Sister Eunice, was in your company yesterday. You were traced together to this house which I am about to search."

"Search and be . . . blessed," I answered, "but first show me your warrant."

The document, duly signed and sealed, was produced, and his men to the number of a dozen approached the house. Two remained at the gate, two kept us under observation, two mounted guard over the servants assembled in the kitchen, while the remainder with the commissary made a domiciliary visit through the now empty house. At the end of an hour they had ransacked every room needless to say, without finding either the Holy Grail or the nun Eunice

They had only been gone ten minutes, when a telegram arrived from Vaini requesting me to join him in Naples with all haste.

My former tutor received me with incisive questions. I dared not tell him of the transformation his elixir had wrought in the aged female commended to my

charge, observing merely that she had benefited by a charge of air, and hastening to describe the police official's visit.

The Professor's fine lips twisted in a compassionate smile. "It was not a police official," he murmured, "but the head of the Neapolitan Camorra. An expert might fail to tell them apart."

The Camorra, as every one knows, is a secret association of criminals of all classes, distributed throughout Southern Italy—a government within the Government—wielding political power, arresting justice, extorting blackmail, and enforcing its mandates in the fine and subtle manner of the *quattro cento*.

Vaini, watching me attentively as he balanced the big pencil on his forefinger, read my thoughts and softly added, "It is a Tammany Tiger, gone slightly mad, and armed with an Italian stiletto."

"What," I asked, "has the Camorra to do with the recovery of the Holy Grail?"

"The Camorra suspects the police of having stolen it, and of trying to cheat the Camorra out of its share."

"You told me the other day you conjectured the whereabouts of the chalice. Have you found it?"

"Unfortunately the police are also on its track. The man who stole it—merely for the kudos of the thing—was nearly stabbed last night, and is in extreme peril this morning. You cannot expect the police to stand by and see themselves defrauded."

"Perhaps," I said, "you know who has committed this theft?"

"Oddly enough," replied Vaini, "it is your fellow-student of thirty years ago—Orion Marblehead. Which may somewhat explain why, as my time to-day is engrossed in playing police against Camorra, I ask you to go immediately to his relief, and aid his escape from Naples."

"At the risk of my life!" I impatiently ejaculated. "Mr. Marblehead should know enough to cast a sop to Cerberus."

"That," gravely replied the Professor, "might be compounding a felony, a thing neither Camorra nor police would condescend to. Friend of my soul!" he added in caressing Italian, laying his hand upon mine, "your hesitation mortifies me. Through all these years have I been mistaken in my favourite pupil?"

I yielded weakly to this appeal, and received instructions as to the precise locality where Mr. Marblehead would show himself, at the corner of an alley called Guantai Nuovi, facing the Church of San Giacomo. I imposed a single condition. "Vaini," I said, "I, as well as the Camorra, have a conscience, and not for an instant will I be custodian of stolen property."

On reaching the Piazza del Municipio, and pausing at the squalid street indicated, I observed that a funeral Mass had just been celebrated in the church before me, and that the cortège, a few bystanders, and the Frati della Misericordia, clad in the long gowns of their order, were dispersing. One of the latter, his head covered by the usual black hood which concealed all but the eyes, brushed past me, and as he did so, I was stupefied to hear him softly whistling an American melody, "Let us drink to the girls that are waiting." I gazed after him in amazement, then, in response to a slight salutation of his hand, followed into the deserted byway. He turned as soon as we were alone, and with the familiar nasal accent of New England exclaimed: "Say, did you ever smell such a rotten perch as Naples?"

Then with great dexterity he drew off his sombre habiliment, casting it with a muttered imprecation into an open doorway, and revealing as he did so the

"It was in Vaini's cloister garden that I found her, walking amid its triangles of lawn, its sky-swung clusters of oranges, its trickling splash of water amid monastic statues and the walls and arches about which age has cast its silver-grey"

features of my fellow-student of thirty-five years before. His face had become seamed with fine lines of *Hustlerium tremens Americanus* since we parted in the spring of 1870, but it was the same alert countenance of clear-cut resolve, and his crisp, incisive vernacular was still the vibrant voice of Massachusetts. As he uncovered his head, I noticed that he had become completely bald.

"I saw you come sa'ntering along," he said, shaking me warmly by the hand, "and knew you right away. Says I, 'That's dear old tenderfoot, and ain't he dressed nice, browned up some, too!' Let's go to a hash-house and snatch a lunch," he added, drawing on a cap. "I am most starved, and want a square lay-out. The drinks are on you," he added with a smile and a wink—"I'm a stranger."

I led the way to Pilsener's Restaurant round the corner, and learning that a turkey was being roasted in the kitchen, ordered it taken upstairs to a private room, together with the obbligato accompaniment of chippolata sausage, giblet sauce, stewed celery, and purée de pommes.

Mr. Marblehead observed these preliminaries with satisfaction, wiping two or three shining beads from his bald pate, and pouring forth his phrases with packed richness of expression. "Let me readjust the focus of events," he began; "this waiter has no more sense than a coroner's jury. I had a small shoat for Christmas dinner, and it seems like I've not had a bust-out since then. Why not? Because I had a brace on such a job as doesn't come once in a century. Say, these Neapolitans have no more shame than a back-yard cat. Yes, sir, it is a big job, and I want you to help me *right now*. I want you to get on to it P.D.Q—pretty . . . dam . . . quick."

"Mr. Marblehead," I said as the turkey was placed before us, "I hope that you have found happiness in all these years since we were students together."

"Happiness!" he echoed, helping himself abundantly; "some men would say a cool drink, a thirty-cent partaga, and the American Sunday papers. I had all that, and it was not enough."

"Not enough!" I ejaculated.

"It's thirty-two years," pursued my companion reflectively, "since I met with an accident. I got engaged to be married. She was an elegant lady, clean as a hound's teeth, and not a fly on her. She had all the hall-marks of youth and beauty, right down to the ground. Her poppa was in the book trade in Amen Corner, and I met them crossing from Liverpool to New York, where the old man had business. She had a small dog, the peskiest-tempered animal you ever saw—I called him Bitters because he had so much bark and w'ine. Now I generally hit a winning stride, but love-making has never been my strongest hold. I looked over all four sides of her, and brought my proposal down to business. 'Will you have me?' I said—'satisfaction guaranteed, or the money returned.' When I told her poppa I was willing to take his daughter off his hands, he just looked me over in that dignified English way, enough to freeze the stuffing in a lightning rod. He was the sort of man that makes a point of solid silver handles to his coffin. I was worth half a million dollars in those days, and her poppa and I jolted her into saying yes. It jarred me some when she broke the engagement, telling me something I savvied down to mean I was not the only pebble on the beach. I reckon I saw red just then!" And remembering his wrongs Mr. Marblehead lapsed into profanity, wherein he breathed a defiance as sweeping as that which rings through the Athanasian Creed.

"I am sorry to hear you had so serious a misadventure," I answered

sympathetically; "but you are not one to remain long discouraged. You soon turned to other and larger fields of action."

"Action!" he repeated angrily. "Yes, and a criminal action at that. I am in for the fight of my life, and I always fight to a finish Say, if you value nerve thrills, spend to-night dodging about with me, you really can't afford to be out of it, and, say, bring a five-shooter with you the way to parry is to fire first." With which words he produced a small package, and removing a strip of chamois skin revealed a green chalice, apparently cut from a monster emerald, three inches in height and the same in diameter.

"Look at her," he exclaimed, exultingly smiting the table; "she's worth a king's ransom, even when kings were rated high. With the money Bond Street would give for that, I could settle in England, buy out some belted and busted earl, and look up my fiancée of years ago. It's the weakness of my character that I still care for the woman—the fact is, sir, she's fifty per cent. grit and the rest pure gold."

"This is the Holy Grail," I ejaculated, "stolen some days ago from the Cathedral. Mr. Marblehead, I am shocked to find it in your possession."

"Do you think," he answered with a chuckle, "that a man has no ambition! Years ago I had enough of sending shuttles back and forth and calling it strenuous life. I resolved to do something great. A voice whispered, 'The man that gets away with the Holy Grail is decorated. All the world from Launcelot and Guinevere to our own day will pay to hear him lecture how he lifted it.'" So saying, Mr. Marblehead bit off a piece of plug tobacco, and spat with faultless accuracy into the eyes of a cat that stood sniffing like Lazarus at the gate.

"Guinevere!" I murmured thoughtfully, taking the emerald in my hand.

"Yessir," continued my companion reflectively, "from Joseph with his corner in wheat when Egypt was starving, right down to modern times, we all want to be something more than a fumble-bug The police were on my trail yesterday, the Camorra tried to stiletto me last night. I put on that fire-escape suit and kept just about five laps ahead—now you have got to get me out of Naples, for there is big money in this."

So impressed was I with our mutual insecurity, that without waiting to conduct Mr. Marblehead to Vaini, I hurried him to Sorrento, and lodged him at the hotel adjoining our villa. I made no further allusion to Miss Godfree than to say that our former tutor had entrusted an elderly nun to my care, whose health required solitude.

III.

It was evening when I reached the villa and learned that Miss Godfree had retired to her room. The next day she came downstairs to luncheon daintily dressed in China-blue bodice and skirt, with peach-blow undersleeves. Her feather-soft hand rested in mine as she overwhelmed me with extravagant thanks for something she vaguely referred to as "a palsied heart awakened"

I am always embarrassed by thanks, so I hastily led her to Vaini's library, where a frugal refreshment was served—fried haddock with cucumber salad, quails in a bed of pommes pailles, truffles *en serviette*, and a pineapple cheese following in quick succession. I gave her the philosopher's Bohemian wine-glass filled with '48 Amaranth Madeira, a dozen of which rested in his cellar. The room, quite unchanged to this day, is a type of refined comfort. It has book-cases, deep easy-chairs, and writing-tables, and rare and beautiful objects of

Vaini's collecting, for though a man of limited means, he possessed exquisite taste for the embellishments of life. He laughingly avowed his hatred for the squalid aspects of the world. About us were rich embroideries, Toledo blades, pictures suggesting the perfection of feminine contours, Venetian mirrors, illuminated missals, Delft porcelains, crystals, and ivory Madonnas. The February sun, with fervent imagination, kindled crimson arabesques upon the damask hangings, and looking from the windows the trees in their tremulous winter foliage seemed lightly clad as nymphs whose limbs thrill with the fever of approaching spring. I thought Miss Godfree graceful as hyacinths in the wind, changing and wilful—beautiful as a summer sky. She had a flattering way of cleverly amplifying what I said, tossing my homespun thought back in embroidered silk. Her face had a delightful air of meditative self-reliance through which gleamed an aerial joy in her recovered youth.

She took my note-book from the library table, and opening it at random, read aloud the silly, scribbled words—

"Un Baiser c'est peu de chose,
Pas plus que feuille de rose,
Ou qu'une feuille de laurier"

Then turning upon me those laughing brown eyes, she abruptly closed the volume, and I felt as foolish as the proverbial boy at a girls' party.

"Come with me to the garden," she presently exclaimed, as cigarettes were placed before us, "and we will gather a posy of violets." So saying, she left me in search of a hat and jacket, while I waited in the hall, where on the table lay this characteristic letter from Orion:

"DEAR SIR,

"It is always pleasant to renew an early friendship, and you acted white yesterday. I should like to return the compliment by cordially inviting you to join the Suicide Club of which I am President. Headquarters, Chicago; business hours 10 to 4. Over six hundred members scattered thoughout U.S.A., including many rising men and women of America. He who conquers fear of death, conquers by the same magnificent stroke all the fears of life. A time will come when you will have had enough—perhaps too much—of this dear old lark-singing earth. I would like to have you join right now.

"Yours truly,
'ORION MARBLEHEAD'"

I was too familiar with my former colleague's originality to be surprised at this odd missive. Of the Suicide Club I knew that it had been founded during the feverish years that followed the American Civil War, that it includes a scattering of army men, a heavy percentage of doctors, a number of penniless artists, a large contingent of castaway lovers, a modicum of erratic parsons. One-fifth are women, and usually all who join have some profound disgust of life, whose poor game has ceased to be worth the candle.

In the enchantment of Miss Godfree's presence, the narrow cloister walks expanded to vistas of translucent beauty. The daylight mellowed through that suave afternoon, lighting afresh the purple and yellow bloom of the long-gone summer. The palm-trees lifted their feathery tops, motionless and breathless as ships becalmed. A fragrance of mignonette touched the air, and from the brooding lustre of the myrtles came a rich piping of the blackbird. At such a moment, who would not understand the significance which lovers feel in presence of the mating song of birds!

"The Professor's fine lips twisted in a compassionate smile 'It was not a police official,' he murmured, 'but the head of the Neapolitan Camorra. An expert might fail to tell them apart.'"

I have often sought to recall the wonderful things we talked of, whose half-remembered meaning haunts that hour—as roses pressed in some choice volume keep something of the colour and perfume of their day. I was conscious that from the emerald sward at our feet, embroidered with flickering sunshine, many things long dormant suddenly awoke.

"How strangely these few hours have drawn us together!" I exclaimed, hesitating before the face lifted to mine. "It seems as if for both life might be begun anew, far from the things that we have suffered from and hated."

We seated ourselves at the broad old marble table at which, a century ago, the monks gathered and chatted over their coffee. "Only to think," said Miss Godfree, reading my thought, "that in their godless youth they must have revelled in the amorous fiction of Italian story-tellers, and in their winter-bitten age have recalled the pulse and passion of Italian songs they were to hear no more." And the blackbird twittering in the tree-tops sweetened his song to rapture as she spoke.

But the subject uppermost in my thoughts was my companion's life, and I begged her to tell me something of its story.

She turned wistfully a hesitating instant toward the wild-grape fragrance of the vines about us. "You wish me," she began, "to lead you from this cloister back to the garden of my English home. I had a happy girlhood, and to my father I owe a superior feminine education, as we understand such things in England. It was intended to fit me for the 'Smart Set,' if I married well and made my way. He required me to read understandingly a leader in the *Times* each morning. I knew the last dozen Derby and Goodwood winners. I was taught a smattering of French, and made to cultivate a taste in flowers, music, and cuisine, though I cared little for either. I had a Cowes Week during each of my three seasons. I rode straight to hounds, could volley a tennis-ball, and find a train in Bradshaw."

The brown eyes, that in the sunshine had a flash of golden nuggets, sought mine with kindling interest.

"After so comprehensive and practical a training," I observed sympathetically, "I am not surprised to find you in the Church of Rome. It is the only Church Militant remaining, and though myself a heretic, I doubt not that the removal of the Vatican would mean the collapse of Christianity."

"You call yourself a heretic!" observed Miss Godfree with a shocked expression.

"A disciple of Epicurus," I explained, "loving all that is beautiful in life. I have known Christians who scarcely came up to that moderate standard. But we are straying into theology. Forgive me for leading you back to yourself."

"Fate willed it," she resumed, "that in Rome in 1865, when I was a girl of eighteen, I should meet Professor Vaini, who must then have been twice my age. In the library we have just left is the lute he gave me. Can you fancy him singing love songs, reciting Leopardi's *Gonsalvo*, and teaching me the poetry of gardens?

"From the first I was afraid of him—he was such a strange and secret man, and always in our studies I was conscious that beyond my horizon he beheld unaccountable things. My refusal brought him the morbid bitterness of wounded pride. From love he passed to cold, vindictive anger, and though thirty-five years have passed, he would willingly do me a mischief to-day.

"It was half a dozen years later that I met a man much younger than Vaini, who by an odd coincidence had also been his pupil. We crossed the Atlantic together, and met again in New York. He was a rich American; my father

urged me to accept him, and we became engaged. His was a curious nature, the very reverse of Vaini's, and so dominated by material egotism as to strip all life of its amenities and make of it a soulless hulk. He said we should live in New York, and to this day, remembering the words, I behold again the hideous background of Fifth Avenue."

"Would it be indiscreet," I asked, "to hazard a guess at your suitor's name?"

"His name," answered Guinevere carelessly, "is Orion Marblehead."

She sat silent now, tracing a pattern on the brown-needled turf beneath Vaini's pines. Far down the pergola, a sheen of dancing sunlight beckoned me on.

"Will you think me rude," I whispered, audaciously taking her hand, "if I say I dreamt of you last night? It was a splendid dream—a mirage wherein we walked together in this small garden, suddenly transfigured. And as now I took your hand and cried aloud . . ."

"You said," interrupted Guinevere, "'Let us conquer fate and be happy!' I shared that wild dream with you and felt your touch, and at the sound of your voice I awoke."

"And now," I exclaimed, drawing her to me . . .

At this critical instant I was disagreeably surprised to hear a drawling nasal voice which came from the top of the cloister wall above us utter the startling phrase:

"I have got him sewed up, you bet."

It was Mr. Marblehead, who, having climbed one of the ladders used in Sorrento gardens to trim the vines, was contemplating me, his face wreathed in smiles.

Miss Godfree sprang to her feet at the words and fled away down the path.

"Say," continued Orion confidentially, drawing a handful of peanuts from his pocket, "don't you ever trust a man with hog teeth. It's your friend the Camorra man, and I beat him hands down. It was an even dollar which jumped first. He blazed up like a bonfire when I catched him—there's no water in the well, only a mud bottom, so he fell soft. He's just about tuned to concert pitch! Listen! sounds like he was twisting knots in the devil's tail."

I remembered in the adjoining garden a disused well, a dozen feet deep, into which Orion had evidently cast his pursuer. And issuing from the earth, I faintly heard the rich and fervent fluency of Italian malediction. The unlucky Neapolitan seemed to be swearing a dozen oaths at once, reminding me of an instrument whose keys are smitten all together.

"Mr. Marblehead!" I cried excitedly, "you are placing yourself dangerously within the law. You have committed a monstrous theft, angered the entire ecclesiastical world, and assaulted an important official."

"I see you have a lady friend," observed my former fellow-pupil, coolly disregarding my words, and fastening his gaze upon the disappearing form of Miss Godfree. "I overheard you love-making just now, and—say—your love-making is loose in the handle. I dare say you think that as a velvet-edged spell-binder you hold the world's long-distance record. I allow you know how to prospect a likely spot, and if this is your own ranche, you are nicely fixed. But when you are trying to come it over a woman, you have got to talk your durndest. You want to put some ginger into it and buck up at both ends. Why don't you be a husky-tough like me and have some style? A woman likes a man that can do a quick turn. I tell you, sir," he added in a modest undertone, "when I make love, I generally lay out to beat the band. I let her have it first in the face." Then suddenly changing to another thought, he continued: "Those

low-down Italians have swindled me . . . the Holy Grail is only bottle-glass. I am going to Naples to-morrow, and if the Law Courts give me a right enough charge I'll bust their Camorra out by the roots. Before I go, take a word of advice. Your occult philosophy no longer runs smooth on all fours. I think it needs a shave. You have held its nose on the grindstone a wee mite too long. There is a dark beyond through which Vaini's two for-a-dollar search lights won't carry. I've entered you for the Suicide Club—it's the chance of your life. It's handier, because you hustle right away from the old man with a scythe, and he don't even have time to look for a strawberry mark on your ear. The world won't be in darkness, even though you blow out your little candle. So long"

That evening, as the clock struck eight, Guinevere came down to dinner, rose-white and smiling. Mr. Marblehead's interruption had passed unheeded. "Come," I said, leading her to table, "let us have a well-wined dinner, Irroy brut with the croquettes, Rudesheimer with the foie gras, and after salt codfish on toast we will drink scalding hot coffee in Vaini's Crown Derby cups, with a sip of 1801 Soleil Couchant Cognac for the finish."

The good cheer warmed our spirits and we talked of many things—less of the past, which we had done with, than of the future, which instinctively we realised to be ours. Before dinner I had freshly tuned the ivory lute Vaini had given her in the days of his ill-starred courtship, and when we returned to the library I placed it in her hands.

She ran her fingers deftly over its strings in fluent allegretto, and at the touch a splendid ecstasy filled the air. Before her on the table a great bunch of violets whispered their fragrant secret.

Something called me—souvenirs, regrets—or was it the unknown that is always to come? To this day I still can hear those fine accords, whose heartbreak wove the violets before her into music. Standing thus, she was superb, her fine head poised upon the figure of a caryatide. She seemed the tinted-winged image of girlhood, with its visions and romance. I remember thinking that her face was like a flower-garden, and that when she smiled the breeze was blowing over the flowers. I watched the crimson kindle on her cheek, in mute token of a heart on fire. Her thoughts seemed far away, and for an instant her eyes glistened. I was troubled at this, because the sight of tears in a handsome woman's eyes is apt to make a man do foolish things. Upon what happy wings those memorable moments flew, as in her glance I read the fascinating mystery of a promise.

Softly she sang. It was a song that flushed me with guilty joy, for I divined that a new world lay waiting where her voice summoned. It was a song to set the wild-flowers dancing, yet beneath its forest murmur I listened to a weird accent of enchantment and despair. The blackbirds that through the twilight had filled the garden with their song were silent now. I wondered if they, too, were listening.

It was a well-known German air, "Die letzte Melodie." When the songs shall all be sung and the birds shall all be dead! As she sang, the sea was murmuring a music of its own, thus seeming to make her the embodiment of minstrelsy. Her voice thrilled with the pleading of violin notes, touched with a vague, voluptuous regret.

Yes, I listened with guilty joy, for across those rich accords I beheld a vision brilliant as the Arabian Nights. I had done wrong in applying Vaini's weapons to my own ends, but wrong doing is sometimes very sweet. When the song

'The red-gold in her veins faded to silver, and clad in the dusky habiliments of St. Ursula, she stood before us, blighted and silent—an aged woman. It was so horrible a thing, that the room swam before me.'

ceased in a lingering sense of tears, I knew that the time had come to speak. "I have been looking into the heart of things," I exclaimed, rising—"looking through the prism of that song. I perceive that you have waited years for me, that I have been slow in coming, but at last I am here."

"And now that you have come," answered the strange girl, looking down at her lute-strings, "what are you going to do?"

"You and I have done with society-made values," I answered; "we will leave Sorrento to-morrow morning."

"What will Vaini say . . . ?"

"After what has happened I dare not wait to know."

"And Mr. Marblehead . . ?"

"For once in his life, Mr. Marblehead will be left."

"It all seems like the dream we dreamt together," murmured Guinevere, lifting her eyes to mine.

My hands were on her shoulders, and we were standing face to face. "It does," I answered quickly, "and when a dream comes true it is because the gods have spoken. The immortals kindling the sunrise cast no shadow."

IV.

For me the night that followed was one of wakeful hours and fitful sleep. Again and again I started from sinister presentiments. The chief of Neapolitan police and the genius of the vengeful Camorra lurked in awesome shadows, watching my approach, and shifting their stilettos to a firmer grasp. Vaini pursued me with shrill reproaches, and Mr. Marblehead's satanic cunning baffled my escape.

At last daylight came—the grey daylight of a cold rainy midwinter morning. I rang for coffee, my portmanteau was closed, the carriage was coming. It was my intention to drive with Miss Godfree along the Castellammare Road, ostensibly with that town as our destination, then turning to the right at St. Agnello, reach Amalfi, and thence the railway at La Cava. I doubted not that this elliptical flight would disconcert pursuit until we were beyond the Alps.

At the appointed hour of nine, Guinevere was ready, and we waited a feverish instant in the library. The sound of heavy carriage wheels on the gravel followed, and to my stupor an old-fashioned travelling vettura halted at the door, and a figure wrapped in voluminous overcoat and muffler alighted.

The front door was opened, and at the sound of Vaini's voice, bidding Pasquale let me know of his arrival, Guinevere and I were as revellers whose laughter dies at the cock-crow. Nothing save heroic measures could now avail, and motioning her to remain out of view, I went to meet Vaini. "Professor," I said, detaining him in the hall, "a deplorable accident has happened. A careless hand (ask me not whose) has given the nun some drops from one of the casquet vials."

"And she is dead!" ejaculated my tutor in a quivering voice, turning upon me a face of frightened horror.

"On the contrary, the Urohæmatoporphyria Cytheræ has restored her youth. She is a beautiful girl of twenty—shy as girls will be, and morbidly reluctant to be seen."

"Per le trippe del diavolo," he cried furiously, "by the devil's intestines, who has done this?"

"Vaini," I answered, laying my hand soothingly upon his arm, "I cannot tell

a lie . . . it was Orion Marblehead. More than this, he has planned to elope with her. I gather that in bygone years there was some tenderness between them."

"Friend of my soul," ejaculated the master, listening with a menacing pucker of the eyebrows, "you stab me to the heart."

"I have already provided for the confusion of their project," I added with determination. "Leave all to me. You will remain here and give Orion the dressing-down he deserves, while I take the girl hence, and place her beyond his reach."

The Professor's lips twitched with jealous rage, and there was in his voice a vitriolic note. His keen face, cruel with disappointed love, seemed imprint with the antique Roman type and fired with its elements of intellect, refinement, and savagery.

"Cattivo Pazzo!" he muttered under his breath. "Orion shall dance with the devil in hell."

At the words the front door was again opened by Pasquale, and Mr. Marblehead appeared, smiling unperturbed.

"You want to size things up and start in on a new deal," he said to Vaini "The Holy Grail is yours—here it is, bottle-glass, and worth ten francs. But the lady is mine, and I have come for the goods."

The Professor had caught a glimpse of Miss Godfree and waited to hear no more. Springing past me with swift venom, he entered the library, and carefully selecting a vial from the casquet, emptied its contents into his hand and dashed them in a sparkling spray over Guinevere. Above his strident voice rang the sound of her mortal outcry. Her anguished eyes met mine, and there was a pathetic motion of her hands towards me as she shuddered and paled. In an instant her bright face changed to transparent whiteness—the face of a fairy grown suddenly old. The red-gold in her veins faded to silver, and clad in the dusky habiliments of St. Ursula, she stood before us, blighted and silent—an aged woman. It was so horrible a thing, that the room swam before me In their glance of mutual aversion I read the sequel of Vaini's ill-fated courtship, and realised, as never before, that there is no force so vindictive as disappointed love. Vaini had smitten her as with lightning, inflicting a mischief greater than death.

Mr. Marblehead alone remained unmoved, looking on with the intent silence of the busy mind. His plain face grew radiant as though beyond the pitiful understanding of life he had discerned something sublime. "There must be a fibre of the Massachusetts forest in my backbone," he remarked with a hard lip, "or I could not have seen this and live. Professor, you have made her look like a five-year-old picture-hat, and now she will come with me, where she belongs I guess we may all drop a trap-door on our emotions. Guinevere," he said, turning gravely to the nun, "this is a straight call, and you know I will always treat you white. To-morrow, thirty-four years ago, was to have been our wedding day Come with me We are ready to start right now. Your portmanteau is here, and my only baggage is a snack-basket and a campstool."

Miss Godfree, once more become Sister Eunice, followed her faithful suitor without a word, and together they entered the professor's hired vettum and drove away, I knew not whither Their departure brought a manifest relief to Vaini, who stood watching their going, with the Holy Grail in his hands This object he lost no time in restoring to the ecclesiastical authorities, and received fulsome encomiums in the Italian press for its clever recovery

At my urgent solicitation he removed the Casquet of Essentials from the library table. I represented to him the grievous consequences that might follow its use by a second careless hand if left thus within reach. I was too modest to mention my share in Miss Godfree's adventure, and I doubt not he died in the belief that it had been due to Orion's dangerous meddling. There are occasions when it is wise to hide one's light under a bushel. Months after the Professor's death, I found the casquet in the hiding-place where he had locked it away—the two vials he and I had employed for Miss Godfree still empty.

That evening my former tutor discoursed very earnestly upon what he termed the nun's "semblance" of rejuvenation. He pronounced it a curious hallucination and likened it to a rainbow floating over a cascade, the water alone being real and unchanged, however coloured with evanescent tints.

Mr. Marblehead's clumsy trifling had, he declared, merely rekindled that ephemeral spark of youth which sometimes lingers in the aged, but the figure before us was Eunice, not Guinevere, despite a transitory disguise. His comments upon my credulity in supposing it to have been otherwise were unusually caustic.

Vaini and I had been left alone but a few days, when the following notice appeared in a Neapolitan paper:

FOUND DROWNED AT CAPRI.

The bodies of a man and woman that were washed ashore on the landing beach last Thursday have been identified as those of Signor Marblehead Orion, an American millionaire, and of the English Signorina Godam Free. It is supposed that they threw themselves from the steamer *Faustine* while at anchor during the preceding night. The woman, who, strange to say, was an elderly person disguised in the garb of an Ursuline nun, was clasped in the man's embrace, the singular pair having perhaps eloped together.

So passed away my fellow-student, for whose scheme of life Vaini's intangible philosophy had proved an inadequate foundation.

His mind had aspired to the quest of a superlative treasure such as, in one semblance or another, is the aim of many. He had possessed it for a day, only to realise that the rarest ideals become commonplace at our earthly touch.

In his maturity he had known the unique experience of beholding again, still in the freshness of girlhood, the woman he had wooed in youth—to see her snatched in an instant to an infirm and graceless age.

What wonder if, in the grief of two such disillusions, a disciple of the Suicide Club turned to the tranquil and undying sea!

. . . . . .

I am sometimes asked, now that Vaini is no more and his fame is climbing, what manner of man he was, and what were the methods that led to such supernatual craft. It is in answer to these queries that I have written this and previous narratives, showing, as far as the pupil may illustrate the master's complex mind, those principles of occult force which he found within the grasp of modern science. By thinkers of his own calibre Vaini is considered to have led the way in the unravelling of threads which, after ages of baffled study, are now perceived to connect us with the Unseen World.

I often meditate upon those hours wherein the master taught me to weigh the unreality of things. Sitting in his study this Christmas, with the objects that he loved about me, I seem to see beyond my blazing fire the sunbeams of those

"The tranquillity and vividness of monastic association linger about these walls as a ghost story clings to a haunted house."

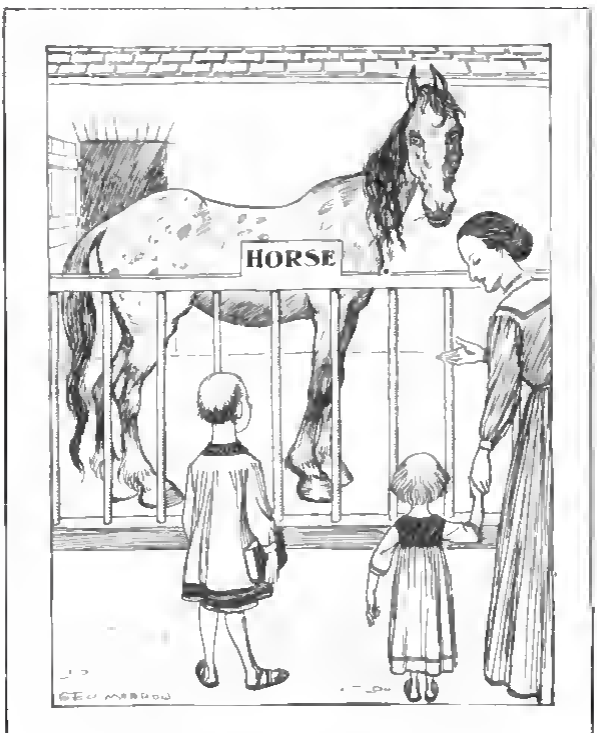
meteoric days. Beside me on his table is the Casquet of Essentials, with whose contents I have never again ventured to experiment. Yonder is his set of amber chessmen, marked with the arms of le Grand Monarque, and on the wall hangs Guinevere's ivory lute.

Here, in Vaini's garden, the roses the Jesuits planted half a century ago still lift themselves upon the cloister buttress with a shy caress. They are of a stock of extraordinary antiquity, popularly descended from roses that flourished at Capri and Ischia before Parthenope and Paestum were known—in days when Poseidon was young and made love to the beautiful daughters of men. Years ago, at first sight of them I bethought me that in ploughing old fields we may turn up the seeds of celestial flowers. Nameless, I have named these roses *Toujours ou Jamais*, in remembrance of that which Guinevere and I agreed should be Forever —and which scarce outlived the brilliance of a day. Above the monks' pergola a yellow trumpet creeper waves its flaming tendrils in profane exuberance, as though after mediæval centuries this tiny span of earth has not yet lost the glamour of its Golden Age. Bend as they may, its paths all lead to aspects of living beauty, and however short, they are more suggestive than many a lifetime. Their witchery holds a meaning beyond the significance of the actual world. The tranquillity and vividness of monastic association linger about these walls as a ghost story clings to a haunted house. In this Villa Sirena, whose very name is music, I seem to hear again that sweet-sung cantilena—as it were a fugitive chord, linking some rapturous memory with the poesy of nature. Deep in the night's heart phantom footsteps come and go.

On pleasant spring mornings I seek my garden at dawn—at the hour of perfumed darkness when in ancient days the nymphs awakened. The early sunshine, climbing these mountain sides with golden shoon, unfolds its opalescent mirror. An instant follows, splendid with awakening life, and brief as the echo of footsteps down the Eternal Silence. And often, thinking of the feet whose tread has smoothed these cloister walks, I remember the wan, grey figure of Eunice, telling her beads, and fancy behind her, leaning at the monastery well, a radiant and imperishable vision of Guinevere.

VISIONS OF THE FUTURE.

THE MOTOR ERA



THE ZOO (A D. 2600)

'Yes, children that is a horse—one of those animals I told you about in the fairy-stories.'

THE PALL MALL MAGAZINE

CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER.

DECEMBER 1908.

A KISS OF DELILAH.

BY WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

ILLUSTRATED BY SOLOMON J. SOLOMON, R.A.

I.

I WAS spending the Ottobrata of 1896 alone at the Monastery of Monte Cassino, not far from Naples. The festa dell' Ottobrata is the last Sunday of October, when in Italy, amid the witchery of autumnal pathos, people go forth into the country to take leave of the dying summer. It is a pagan day, kept pagan through all the monkish centuries, and whoever has witnessed it must have realised how deep a pagan significance underlies the festivals of Italy. There is often some faint survival of the measured classic dance, an instinctive libation poured to Bacchus, and a rural promenade—last relic of Eleusinian processions—to the groves Diana loved. The Ottobrata has come to be a day of forest meditation, spent amid the redwood's beautiful decay. Its charm is incensed with the fine odour of fallen leaves, and to the humblest imagination the flaming sunset rekindles for an instant a semblance of the transfigured Past. The close of such a day is the turning of an illuminated page.

During the preceding weeks I had been with Professor Vaini at his Villa Sirena, assisting in the completion of a mechanism he called our Penumbra, thereby associating it with that occult shade which lies beyond the things of earth. That shade, he knew, could be penetrated provided within the intellectual workshop some artifice could be contrived so keen as to become susceptible of telepathic photography. This perfected mesmerism demanded the invention of a reflector of such psychical delicacy as to reveal and record the consciousness of another mind, whether near or remote. It was to flood unknown darks with a gleam as far beyond our ordinary ken as in microscopic studies ultra violet surpasses visible light, and upon the reflector of this clarified vision to project telepathic negatives. Brain evolution was to reveal itself like the mutation of a kaleidoscope, and the mental spectrum was to show the irised rings of thought, as the solar spectrum defines those of colour. Scientifically speaking, he called it a compound telautoscope. Its exquisite surface had been so refined that it faintly recorded the distant voices that are for ever whispering, and which our physical sense is not attuned to hear. It was indeed a masterful conception to control those frail bonds that join life with life and Past with Present. Now

all was ready; the reflector shone like a soap-bubble, its *antennæ* were charged with nerve-fluid, its centre of electric gravity was determined. What type of experimental subject, I wondered, would Vaini select?

On that Sunday morning, October 25th, 1896, the Neapolitan police awoke to discover that a murder of unusual atrocity had been committed the previous evening at 31, Via Amadeo. During the afternoon popular interest, which in a city steeped in vice takes small heed of homicide, became excited over the details of the crime which had ended Saverio Cinquedea's life. There were dramatic and conflicting circumstances which so effectually baffled the chattering authorities that on the following day several newspapers gravely suggested that Camorra alone could adequately strengthen the arm of Justice. The victim was a dealer in antiques and Renaissance objects, aged 39, of good means, the lower part of his house being his curiosity shop. The entresol was occupied by him alone—bedroom in front, office at the rear. It was in this office that the crime had been committed. On the upper floor lived his wife with their boy Beato, aged eight, and the child's nurse. Above lodged two women servants. Two salesmen, a book-keeper, and an office-boy came every work-day at eight in the morning to open the shop, and it was in attempting to rouse his padrone that the lad stumbled over his dead body.

The antiquary was lying on his back, dressed in his familiar suit of broadcloth, and the autopsy showed thirteen stabs in the body and five on the left forearm. His protruding tongue indicated that he had been so tightly gripped by the collar from behind that strangulation would have prevented any outcry. His watch was in his fob-pocket, the gold links in his cuffs, and one hundred lire in his purse. Robbery was not therefore the motive, and in his breast-pocket was a note-book containing papers of no special importance which had not been disturbed. The body was bathed in blood, which had splashed high upon the wall. On the inner side of the office door a bloody hand had rested, smearing the white paint with finger-prints. It seemed probable that upon his return home at about half-past ten, to which the porter of the Hotel Paradiso testified, he had let himself in by a latch-key, extinguished a lamp, and entered his entresol office leaving the hall in darkness. He had lighted a candle in his room, exchanged his shoes for a pair of slippers, and opened a newspaper. At that moment he was set upon by some one of powerful physique, who, clutching him from behind by the coat-collar, inflicted the first two or three wounds on the right side of the neck, severing an artery. The unfortunate man had apparently wrenched himself partly free, and, with outstretched hands, had sought to clutch his assailant's blade. Curiously, his left arm alone had been lacerated. The wounds on his body would have killed three men, and the surgical experts declared that the attack had been made with such rapidity and skill that not more than two minutes had elapsed between the first blow and the collapse. The assailant must have been sprinkled with the blood that leaped from so many wounds, and on the stairs were footprints and finger-marks of one feeling his way down in the dark.

Public suspicion had quickly fastened upon the dead man's widow, Delilah Cinquedea. It was notorious that, though domiciled under the same roof, they lived apart on bad terms. A month before the murder ten thousand francs had been stolen from the antiquary's writing-table, and he had violently accused her of the theft. The wife had been heard to answer, with a scream of fury, that she wished her husband dead. She was handsome, reputed a woman with a past, and it was surmised that Saverio's declared resolve to turn her and their child from his door had to do with her adventures.

Drawn by S. J. Solomon, R.A.

"An office-boy came every work-day at eight in the morning to open the shop, and it was in attempting to rouse his padrone that the lad stumbled over his dead body"

Some such brief notice I had read in the *Messagero*, when, four days after, came a letter from Professor Vaini informing me that the Judge of first investigation, having the powers of an English Coroner, had authorised the scientific analysis he wished to make conjointly with the inquest. "Carissimo," wrote Vaini, "you have been applying yourself too much to shadowy thoughts. Give yourself a fortnight's relaxation. Join me (to-morrow if possible) at the Grand Hotel, and we will uncover the intrinsic secret of life." It would have been ungracious, not to say ungrateful, to refuse, and the next afternoon found me with my former tutor.

The Professor had made an end of his vegetarian luncheon, and, erect and agile, despite the burden of seventy years, was pacing up and down his sitting-room as I entered. His first word took me aback.

"Carissimo," he began, seizing my hand and looking in my face with a mischievous smile, "you have never had a love-affair—and that is wrong, because every man should taste once of that elixir. It keeps the heart a-bloom. It is not too late, and I have summoned you to an opportunity that is unique. The case against Delilah Cinquedea is overwhelming—motive, opportunity, means, all are present. She is clever, fine-looking, well mannered, and fascinating. Of course she is in prison, the enormous bail of fifty thousand francs not being forthcoming. It is upon her that I wish to test the Penumbra, which should read her mind like an open book. But first a little suavity is necessary to bring her out of the distress and exhaustion wherein she has circled these last days. I am myself too agitated for this, therefore I wish you to go as a good Samaritan, with wine and roses and the oil of gentle words, to bind up her wounds. Tranquillise for me this frightened woman, and when her mind is calm and responsive, we will make the experiment of the age. Present yourself in the skin of a sympathetic admirer. Make yourself agreeable—Malandrino amabile!—and you will be asked to warm both hands at the fire."

The Professor talked on, painting as usual with a broad brush and adding fine lights with a diamond. "In spite of our ephemeral contact with modern ideas," he added, "Naples remains the centre of classic and mediæval crime. It still has its Eleusinian Mysteries, and these are often a prelude to the knife. You must be careful to avoid what has happened to me—or worse."

"What has happened to you?" I exclaimed.

"On leaving the Police Office yesterday, its chief threw his arms about me, and invoked a blessing. Halfway here I missed the gold chronometer you gave me—the watch-chain was cut. It is not so bad as leaving a Cardinal's presence in the old days, and being done to death on the stairs. 'Friend of my soul,' he murmured, 'I shall never forgive you if you allow yourself to receive a *coltellata* in the ribs.'"

Persuaded that the sealed gates were about to unfold and disclose the hidden, hoary secret, and believing the Professor's latest mechanism to be the crowning miracle of the century, I waited only to obtain a Police authorisation to enter the Cinquedea house, whither I immediately directed my steps.

The Galleria Cinquedea, as its owner styled his shop, was familiar to me. I had often made purchases there, and several times, happening to visit it in Saverio's absence, had been received by his wife. Upon presentation of Vaini's order I was at once admitted, and allowed to pass from room to room, where every object was *in situ*. The house had suddenly become a place of sinister stillness. I first examined the hall, where stood a Roman statue of Apollo holding a lyre. On the leg was a russet stain where the departing assassin had

laid his bloody fingers. On the hall door and beside the staircase were other such marks, and the knob of the office door was a dull red, where a blood-wet hand had closed it. I went to the chamber in which the crime had been committed, and saw the dead man's shoes kicked aside by those trampling feet, a chair overthrown in that furious scuffle, the wall spotted as high as my hand could reach. Here was the writing-table from which, a month earlier, ten thousand francs had disappeared. It was noteworthy that for a year past Saverio had taken his meals at a restaurant, avowing a wholesome fear of his household medicine-chest.

Above were Signora Cinquedea's deserted bedroom, sitting-room, small dining-room and, overlooking the garden, a chamber occupied by her boy and his nurse. In the Signora's apartments were a Venetian mirror, a painting of herself in fancy dress as the Biblical Delilah, an imitation Louis XVI. bed, an ivory arci-lute of extraordinary beauty, a dressing-table with the usual paraphernalia of flacons, brushes, and étuis, and over all the florid Italian colour and decoration.

The theory of the prosecution, as set forth in a preliminary *procès verbal* Vaini had put in my hands, was that Delilah Cinquedea had secreted herself in her husband's entresol in anticipation of his return. That, armed with a stiletto the slender blade of which inflicted wounds four inches deep, she had attacked him with a swordswoman's skill and with a physical power equal to that of a strong man. That, the attack ended, she had gone downstairs to the basement kitchen, that there she had cleansed herself, burnt her bloodstained clothing, and made away with the stiletto. That she had then returned to her room, and retired to bed, and had risen the next morning as usual, taken coffee, and talked with her child. That, upon the announcement of Saverio's death, she had burst into a flood of hysterical sobbing which the police downstairs heard and mistook for loud laughter.

I have mentioned having occasionally spoken with Signora Cinquedea at her husband's gallery. I was now so persuaded of her physical inability to commit the crime that I resolved to visit her in gaol and inform her that I would go bail for her, and that she should be free that evening. My solicitor received a cheque for fifty thousand francs and promised to meet me at the prison in an hour with the official release.

I was shown into a room at the place of detention, where the accused was seated at a table on which lay books and a work-basket. Before her stood the nurse Agnese, to whom she was giving orders for the care of her boy. Both turned as I was shown in, and I noticed in the maid's face the cunning slave-look of the Italian domestic. She evidently knew me, and showed her prominent teeth in a stealthy smile.

The Signora Cinquedea rose at sight of me, and, dismissing the maid, advanced with outstretched hands. In her fine brown eyes lurked the immemorial look of the hunted, as she fixed her gaze upon me with eager surprise. "You are sorry for me!" she exclaimed, "are you not? and let me swear to you at once that, through all this horror, I have a pure desire for the truth."

Her profile had the classic grace of a Greek coin, and athwart the October twilight her Venetian hair caught a reflected glow from the crimson heart of the wood fire. She might have been Artemis, the huntress, standing in statuesque poise, self-possessed and self-sufficient, uplifted above the wicked and ignoble things of earth.

"You have not forgotten me," I answered, placing in her hands a posy of the roses that grew at the Villa Sirena, and which in these later years I have

named *Toujours ou Jamais*. "I heard what has happened from Professor Vaini, whose gifts will all be required to unravel this tangled web. I am convinced of your innocence—for you cannot be guilty. Ere the coming month is past, I shall have cleared you before the world."

At the words new hope and life and colour came into Delilah's face, and she lifted her radiant wet eyes to mine. "I am not afraid," she whispered; "I can think like a man. I swear to you by the bread and the wine, by my belief in salvation, *by my hope that my child may live*—that I am innocent."

In after days I often recalled Saverio's widow as I then beheld her, with the tears glistening in her eyes. She was neat-handed and fine-faced, and her figure bore the voluptuous classical contour. Perhaps a drop of untamed faun's blood leaped in her veins. It was one of my fancies, observing the faint flush beneath the sunburn, that she kissed a pink rose every morning. In her ears were heavy gold rings encircling a tiny coral twist that averts the evil eye. The year before she had told me of her joy in the al fresco life, delighting in her half-tropical roof-garden that overlooked Virgil's tomb, and the plain where stands Pompeii and the Roman Surrentum across the bay; for in Italy, she aptly said, the past never fades wholly from view.

II.

The next day passed in further investigation and in reading police reports, and I did not see Vaini until we sat down that evening to an over-late supper. He presently remarked that already the Neapolitan Camorra was obstructing the inquest and preparing to block the trial. Then, with a quiet smile, he added. "I have just learned, through a private inquiry office, that after the disappearance of the ten thousand francs from Cinquedea's desk, his wife paid off several pressing debts. I suppose," he added, "that you have seen her to-day."

"I saw her late yesterday," I answered, "and she wrote this morning, asking me to lunch to-morrow."

"To lunch!" echoed the Professor, greatly astonished.

"Yes," I replied, enjoying his surprise; "you bade me act the good Samaritan, so I have gone bail for her, and she is temporarily lodged at the Hotel Paradiso round the corner."

When Vaini swore it was a good mouth-filling oath that rang and rattled ere it died. Perhaps it was well for the harmonies between us that I was able to divert him with an item of interest.

The antiquary's whereabouts during the last afternoon and evening of his life was a circumstance of obvious importance, and at the end of a week was still unknown. Where had he dined? In whose company had he spent those last hours? Whence had he come at ten o'clock that evening to let himself into the deadly ambush where a figure crouched upstairs in the darkness?

The police had shown me Saverio's pocket-book, among its contents being a fresh newspaper cutting on which were three tiny red ink marks, and the thought flashed upon me that herein lay the fixing of an appointment

> Count the letters of the first line=6.
> Count down to the 7th line (7th day of the week)=Saturday.
> Count down to the 24th line (or day of the month)=24th.
> "At six o'clock, Saturday, 24th."

Drawn by S. J. Solomon, R.A.

"The Captain was manifestly ill at ease, and looked nervously about as I indicated the fresh stains on the wall and the spot where the dead body lay."

Were this a trustworthy conjecture, it would show that, shortly before the crime, Saverio received this summons in a form that, if intercepted, would convey no meaning to his wife.

"It sounds ingenious," growled my former tutor, not quite recovered from the shock of my interpretation of the good Samaritan. "But it is beside the mark, and to-morrow morning we will take better aim. The Penumbra has been made ready in the room where the crime was committed, and there we will test it upon Gennaro Riva, a retired Captain of the Italian Army, whom the police hold as accessory. You will question him, whilst I, moving about the room, will direct our instrument. It matters little what line your inquiry takes, since what I seek is the thought at the back of his head."

The next morning the Professor and I were in Cinquedea's office with the apparatus in readiness, when a police official announced "Il Capitano Riva." A man of forty, slightly under six feet, of olive complexion, and thick short moustache, entered, walking smartly and holding himself well. He was good-featured—the style of head barbers place in their shop windows. As he seated himself I became conscious of a faint aromatic odour of musk. Vaini stepped aside and looked out upon the garden, while I plied the Captain with questions. Presently the Professor moved to a bookcase behind the accused, and directed the sensitive retort towards him.

The Captain was manifestly ill at ease, and looked nervously about as I indicated the fresh stains on the wall, and the spot where the dead body lay.

"And the Signora Cinquedea," I inquired, shifting the line of attack, "how many years have you known her?"

"A speaking acquaintance for ten years or less."

"Is it true that several years ago her husband forbade you his house?"

"It is not true."

"Two nights ago," I said, fixing him with a straight-flung Italian gesture, "the Signora's private box in her bedroom was broken open, and a receipt found for something deposited in the bank. Yesterday that receipt was presented by a police official, and a packet of letters surrendered in exchange."

The Neapolitan's impassive face flushed as though I had struck him. "Those letters are mine," he answered, his eyes dilating with excitement; "they can only have been obtained through fraud."

"Compromising letters from you, for which Signora Cinquedea holds the receipt!" I retorted, laughing at our enemy. "This implies an intimacy which, in view of the murder of her husband, will have great interest for the jury."

Captain Riva listened in ominous silence, and his handsome face darkened. Had we been alone, I believe he would have leaped upon me.

"These letters," I continued, showing him the packet, with its broken seals, "were placed in my hands last evening, and have been read. There are allusions to a duel fought by you nine years ago, on behalf of Cinquedea's wife. Tell me the motive of that duel."

"The quarrel was over a card table, and nowise concerned the Signora, though she felt a deep interest in it, because she knew both combatants."

"Your opponent," I continued, "was Count Scarafaggio, a professional card-sharper. Was he also 'a speaking acquaintance' of Cinquedea's wife?"

A faint smile moved the lips under that dark moustache, as Riva answered: "Count Scarafaggio is Signora Cinquedea's brother."

"From the allusions in your letters," I observed, "I inferred him to be her lover. There is no mention in them of a card table dispute, but of something more emotional."

"It is true that there was something behind the altercation over cards. The Signora had become very angry with Count Scarafaggio, having detected him in a dalliance with one of her maids."

"So angry," I added, "that she insisted upon your fighting him, and resorted to the old trick of a game of cards, behind which there is always a woman. She was so furious with Scarafaggio—her brother, you ask me to believe—that she wished him dead. Was there not beneath all this a ferocious jealousy of her own?"

The Italian made a miniature passato with his walking-stick at a heart-shaped flower in the carpet pattern, but answered nothing.

"You took Delilah from him, or he took her from you—which was it?" I asked, hazarding a flight of fancy.

At this climax, much to my annoyance, Vaini interrupted our dialogue by that expressive Italian movement which signifies *Basta*, enough.

The Captain gone, I threw wide a window to clear the room of the musk odour with which he scented himself, and, before casting my eyes upon the sensitive plate Vaini held out to me, I exclaimed, "Whatever the Penumbra may say, that is the man who killed Saverio!" Then, glancing down, I deciphered, amid a spider's web of phrases, these gleaming brain-words:

" . . . trap to bring me to this room . . . brave front . . . what are they but a pair of charlatans? . . . how does he know that? . . . if only a few of our *galantuomini* were here! . . . not another so soon . . . lover, brother . . . brother, lover. . . ."

"You bedevilled him with so many lines of attack," grumbled the Professor, "hence this confusion. Your luncheon hour approaches, and I wish you to arrange that the Signora comes here to-morrow, upon whatever errand you please. Next time you shall direct the tablet, and I the inquiry. I quite share your opinion that Scarafaggio is a lover in the travesty of a relative."

As he finished speaking I glanced again upon the Penumbra, and beheld that it was flashing like a kaleidoscope in a fit. Could it be that we had passed unbidden beyond the borderland of human things and were arousing unknown and dangerous forces?

Signora Cinquedea breakfasted—or, more properly speaking, dined—at noon, and twelve o'clock struck as I was shown into the dining-room of her apartment at the Hotel Paradiso, where a table laid for two was spread with the Italian *antepasto*. A bottle of golden Episcopio and one of ruby Chambertin stood sentry between the olives and sardines, and my posy of *Toujours ou Jamais* roses, the only flowers in the room, was beside them.

My beautiful hostess entered smiling with serene amiability, unperturbed by her tragic situation, yet with a subdued and saddened look—a shadow on the brow of Athena. She was dressed in pale fragrant drapery, and was no longer yesterday's type of a woman waiting upon the accidents of fate. She thanked me again in a fluent phrase for her temporary freedom, and there was in her utterance a subtle intonation and cadence that seemed the gamut of a sweet, deep nature.

"And now," she continued, "come to table. The *frittata* is served; let us drink the wine of friendship. Be mine a world of peace and humble plenty—of music and your roses. Above all, no love. What is the love you men are for ever vaunting but a base passion, selfishness, and a jealous vanity that turns sour at every change in the wind? I suppose," she added, looking up with a wicked

smile, "you talk your light-hour love to all the loveless girls that listen. *Detto, fatto!* no sooner said than done."

"On the contrary," I replied, piqued at this persiflage, "I belong to a Thinkers' Club, the 'Chosen Few' whose business it is to realise ideals. My holidays are devoted to the study of sidelights upon curious things, and I am as shy of love-making as Joseph."

'How many belong to your Club?" asked Delilah.

"The Chosen Few are Professor Vaini and I."

"I know Vaini," observed the lady, as a *rizotto* was placed before us. He is what the French call *une boîte à surprises*. Be not vexed, at my imperfect appreciation of him and his sidelights. To be so wise you must read much. I do not care for books; so many of them are what Englishwomen call *rot*!"

"You are so far right," I answered, "that a library does not hold more truth than a wild forest: I have never known my own mind so well as at twenty, when I lived one summer in the woods and caught my trout in mountain streams and baked my potatoes in the ashes."

"And now," she interrupted, pouring me out a cup of black coffee, "you cling to those tags and labels the world ties to our skirts. To think that I should be sitting alone with such a rake-hell!" Then suddenly her banter ceased, and with great earnestness, her dark eyes half a-dream, she murmured, "It is because I feel safe with you, I who am a prisoner in the enemy's camp; who, in the midst of this misery, can say with St. Paul, I die daily."

"The good book says, Peace be to thee, fear not, thou shalt not die."

"May your words be prophetic!" she exclaimed; "if I do not weep, it is because such words ring in my soul."

"It should still further encourage you," I said in confidential *sotto voce*, "that I have formed my own theory as to the crime. I return presently to your house for its verification. If I am right in believing that Saverio was killed by *two* assailants, both of whom left the house immediately after its commission. . . ."

The Signora listened with so sudden a change of expression that the next words faltered unspoken. Her lips hardened and her eyes glowed with tragic consciousness. She rose abruptly, and, walking to the mantelpiece, lighted a cigarette. Turning, she faced me with her accustomed calm, and said in a quick low voice, "I have heard many theories, and some," she added with an ironical laugh that rang with bitterness, "are much more silly than others."

Then suddenly, casting aside her cigarette and her defiance, she said: "A month hence, when this horror has ended, you will think more gently of me. When life draws to a close and twilight falls upon our little labour—we remember its morning. It is so with our attachments—when the storm is past, Time, the consummate artist, refines and endears our humblest memories."

My thought took wing at the light in her face—the light of the Italian afternoon that touched her with its benediction. And behind the eyes that looked so deeply into mine—behind the words a quiver on her lips—I divined a subtle secret silence . . . like a bird's heart beneath the folded wings.

On leaving the hotel I returned to the Galleria to resume the task of piecing together circumstantial evidence. Assuming that Vaini's apparatus gave its testimony in favour of the accused, her defence would be vastly strengthened by a background of fact. The bloodstains led from Saverio's room to the foot of the stairs, where they parted, one line continuing to the kitchen, the other leading to the front door. The impression grew upon me that the injuries to the body, strangulation from behind and stabs in front, showed a double attack. The

antiquary had been seized by the back of the collar, the same assailant holding his right hand, Cinquedea's left arm only having been lacerated. The second assailant, who confronted him, had delivered a succession of stabs in the region of the heart, and the swift attack had been executed with the violence of tremendous passion. If I were right in suspecting Captain Riva, who was the other assassin?

At this half-spoken ejaculation, I became conscious of a cat-foot presence behind me, and turning, beheld what John Bunyan terms "an ill-favoured one" watching my movements. The newcomer was a man of forty, well dressed, and with as hang-dog an expression as I have ever seen. His furtive scrutiny changed to a fawning smile as he introduced himself with Neapolitan volubility as the Signora Cinquedea's brother, Count Scarafaggio. He added with unctuous suavity that, being aware of the service I had rendered his sister, he was impatient to present his thanks.

There was a faint white scar on his cheek such as the cut of a whip might leave, and the thought came to me that, in the death struggle, Saverio had struck him with the rattan walking-stick found on the office floor.

"I am persuaded of the lady's innocence," I answered, "for the proof is clear that the crime was committed by two persons, both strong men like yourself, who, their work done, left the house by different exits. The woman, had she made the attack, would have returned whence she came. Why should she wish to go out into the street? But no stains lead upstairs from the antiquary's room. The two men come down feeling their way in the dark. One touches the statue, and, thus learning his own position, makes for the door. The other takes the direction you are looking, to the service stair, washes himself in the kitchen, and lets himself out by the servants' gate. . . . What is the matter? You seem troubled . . . you are pallid as this marble."

Count Scarafaggio's white, frightened face was telling the truth. "Povero Saverio," he stammered, "you bring that horrible scene so vividly before me. But now, I go. I have interrupted you too long."

III.

Delilah had mentioned at my leave-taking that she purposed returning that afternoon to her own residence, from which the police were withdrawn. I told her of Vaini's wish to perfect our line of defence by asking some questions, to which she reluctantly consented.

"Vaini is a puffed-out fraud," she muttered, and spat venomously upon the ground.

The maid Agnese was in the closed curiosity shop when I arrived next day, and with her the boy, Beato, playing hide-and-seek about the statue that still bore the imprint of Saverio's blood. Of this child his mother was wont to say, "I love him so dearly, that in some other life, ages ago, surely he was my lover!" With humorous malice I advanced to Agnese, and, shaking her warmly by the hand, gave her the secret Mano Nera grip of the Neapolitan Camorista. She started at the touch, and at the same instant I perceived about the child Beato the musk odour which Captano Riva carried as a fox bears his scent.

"Why is it," I queried with a kindly smile, "that whereas all Christians uncover in presence of the dead, Justice puts on a black cap before those sentenced to die?"

"Before our blessed Virgin," stammered the maid with trembling lips, "I am innocent. Can you slay me, yet save your own soul alive?"

Amused at the effect of my Camorra hand-grip, I asked abruptly, "Tell me something of Count Scarafaggio. Are he and your lady related?"

"Signore," replied Agnese with affected candour, "I have never told a lie If I am to be killed, let me die in the open. I will avow to you there is a *simpatia* between them."

"You mean they are lovers?"

"Blessed Maddalena! does not every woman wish to burn her fingers at the flame?"

"Yet the Count told me they are half brother and sister"

"Quel brutto scalzacane—that ugly, barefoot dog that only gave me five francs last Christmas!"

"No matter. But what makes this child smell so of musk?"

"What would you? is it not his nature?"

"Why should it be his nature to smell like Capitano Riva?"

As I spoke, a sound of music rang through the smitten house—Delilah was touching the arci lute I had noticed in her parlour. The piece she played was *Adelaide*, delightfully familiar, and never have I heard it thrilled with a touch more silver-tongued The chords seemed richer and more responsive than ever before, and on that autumnal afternoon the refrain seemed a reverberance of spiritual things. It is a melody of appealing significance and clustering embroidery, now rendered with a poetic appreciation that gave it a sense wholly new. I realised, as never before, the possibility of thinking and speaking in music.

I was riveted by the charm of her expression. The true virtuoso wakes unimagined significance in old masterpieces, and I listened with delight to a technique that heightened the intimate light and shade. In that instant's rapture I forgot the inharmonica of the hour, and knew that memories long dreaming had awakened

Suddenly I realised that she was revealing qualities within herself. The well-known romance assumed a startling import, and became Delilah's self-interpretation. Never before have I caught so distinctly the phantom chord that whispers from the soul of music. I felt that she was pleading, entreating with the voice of *Adelaide*, and that within its cantilena her heart was speaking For the first time I learned what is meant by the Call of the Song, and asked myself if our fateful experiment might not be bearing me beyond the limitation of accustomed things. It was a mystical summons as distinct as any Vaini's mechanisms had ever produced, and I straightway went upstairs to the music-room.

I halted at sight of the minstrel seated against the tapestried wall, turned a little from me with the great lute ringing beneath her touch In that instant's pause my eyes rested upon a large portrait of the Signora Cinquedea fancifully habited as the Biblical Delilah, in floating draperies, with bared throat, the woman of the Valley of Sorek whom Samson loved. And my fancy flew to those days when Baal-zebub, yet unconquered, descended to earth and walked in the Syrian moonlight with the beautiful daughters of men. The Testament dwells with recurrent emphasis upon those groves, beloved of Moloch, wherein danced the tawny girls and the darker Bedawi, the Philistines and Amalekites and bronzed women of the land of Cush. Whoever reads those brief paragraphs catches between the lines the flash of necklaces and tinkle of bangles and the rhythm of mountain-songs They were playmates of demi-gods, those women with lithe arms and half-bared limbs, not kneeling, but erect, heedless of perturbations about death and heaven, content to take life as a fine coin stamped with a die we cannot change. The beat of harp-strings and whisper of flutes and pulse of timbrels thrills in our

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"I halted at sight of the minstrel seated against the tapestried wall, turned a little from me, with the great lute ringing beneath her touch."

hearing "Let us eat, drink, and love, for to-morrow we die," is the song of those women. And among them is Delilah, and at sight of the strong man, the smiter and slayer, she cries, "Surely thou art a son of Dagon, our God before whom we dance!" Whereat the strong man laughed and drew her to him, unresisting. My vision of the sun-land lasted but an instant—then the human Delilah stood before me with eyes intently fixed upon mine.

"Did he love you?" I asked, still half a-dream.

"No," answered the Signora Cinquedea, speaking I know not of whom, "he cared for none but himself."

This unexpected answer recalled me from Biblical ages. "How strange," she added, "that through my playing I heard your voice calling, '*Let us eat, drink, and love, for to-morrow we die*'! But of whom did you speak when you asked, '*Did he love you?*'"

"Of your dead husband," I answered, embarrassed at the recollection of my fervent imaginings. "And as to whom were you answering?"

"Of Saverio, of course," she replied with flushed cheeks and very bright eyes. "Now I must go; Vaini awaits me, and I must tread my winepress alone. He seeks to thrust himself between me and you; but the time is coming when we shall remember his malice as a mere footnote to this tragedy. In pledge whereof take from me this little silver cup—less the cup than its engraved words, *Amicizia è Fedelità*." Then, swiftly placing her hands on my shoulders and raising herself, she whispered: "If the worst befall . . . if in life a day comes when the threads now woven together are severed . . . call me, however softly, in your hour of need . . . and, living or dead, I will come. *Addio*; join me in the garden in an hour."

I stationed myself unnoticed at a rustic table in the Cinquedea garden, where the Penumbra had been placed behind a spreading myrtle and out of sight of the Professor. I listened unseen to Signora Cinquedea's frosty greeting of her visitor, and, in considering how fine an intellectual duel this salutation prefaced, remembered Orion Marblehead's familiar dictum wherein he summed up an observation upon the gentle sex: "A woman is bound to squeal if you bite hard enough." I knew that my former tutor could be depended on to bite to the bone.

The lady spoke first, in a voice that trembled. "Am I a dog," she exclaimed, "that I must come to your whistle?"

"I am told," replied Vaini with unruffled amiability, "that hell is poorly lighted. So too is the story of Saverio's murder; but I am about to turn on a flashlight before which all but the logic of facts will disappear."

Having assured myself that the Penumbra revolved accurately upon its centre of gravity, I noiselessly extended its antennæ towards Delilah. I remember casting an admiring glance at our beautiful mechanism, whose spheres and ellipses were an illustration of Vaini's well-worn proposition that the realm of an idea may usually be defined by a geometric figure.

"To begin with," observed the Professor, rubbing his hands with bonhomie, "it has been shown that on the night of the crime you were impatient to get the maids upstairs to their attic. You told the cook and housemaid their noise in the kitchen disturbed you. Although the hour was not yet ten they withdrew, leaving you alone on the ground-floor. Was it your object to be able to admit your husband's assassin and guide him to his ambush?"

"All the world knows," answered the accused in a low furious voice, "that the assassin must have been hidden in the shop, and that his motive was a

private vendetta. I never doubted he was brother to some girl Saverio had trifled with."

"Do you know the murderer's name?"

"As well ask me where the tides go, or what becomes of the stars at dawn."

"Suppose I call him Gennaro Riva?"

"You may suppose whatever foolishness you will."

"There are three death-shadows on the office wall. Shall we say that Scarafaggio was with him?"

"What has Count Scarafaggio to do with it?" cried the lady.

"That is what you are here to explain. Is he your brother?"

"My foster-brother," she corrected hastily.

"Not your lover . . . as well?"

Delilah sprang to her feet and began pacing up and down with the elastic smoothness of a feline. Through the screen of myrtle branches I could see her face of pale sinister calm like the set features of sculpture. I, too, felt a rising anger at the cruel rudeness of this interrogatory.

"My instinct was right," pursued Vaini in a jeering banter, while the Penumbra suddenly began reflecting with feverish haste.

Has the fool blabbed again! I read at the end of a sentence.

"Your words are insulting," answered the Signora, resuming her seat. "I shall not discuss such things with you."

"Wild animals," pursued the Professor philosophically, "distinguish their own kind one from another at a distance by the scent. A house-dog knows the scent of his master and of his master's children. To the keen animal sense the kindred-blood is always the same. Now, will you discuss why Capitano Riva moves in a musk odour of his own, and whether it is due to heredity that your child has the same peculiarity?"

Delilah sat silent, and the Penumbra flashed the words: *That musk-rat smell will ruin everything.*

"Ten years ago," resumed Vaini, speaking with a spice of bravura, "you obliged Capitano Riva to fight a duel with your foster-brother. You made choice of the Captain because he is a formidable swordsman, which the Count is not. In a stormy interview you enjoined upon Riva to kill Scarafaggio, and that he did his best to merit the favours he subsequently received from you is proved by the dangerous sword thrust he inflicted."

"Count Scarafaggio," interposed the lady, "had compromised my maid Agnese, who was young and pretty then."

"That is to say," remarked the Maestro, "you had surprised Scarafaggio and your maid in a compromising situation, which roused in you a jealousy that only blood could appease. Why did you not discharge Agnese?"

"That would have been giving her to Count Scarafaggio out of hand," replied the Signora coldly.

"You preferred to keep her by you, almost in durance, a mark for those poisoned arrows one woman knows how to make ready for another. Since the duel, you have incited four attempts upon Scarafaggio's life. That the Count still lives is due to the Camorra which he has paid to protect him."

"Has this anything to do with the murder?" asked Delilah scornfully.

"You promised Scarafaggio forgiveness," replied Vaini, "upon his aiding Riva in the attack on your husband. When that attack began, you opened the door and stood looking on till it was finished. And now," he added, lifting both arms in a frenzied gesture, "if the soul of the murdered man, from remote Infinity, can

hear the summons of an earthly voice, I adjure him to give some token of the truth!"

I have now to record the most extraordinary phenomenon of all my tutor's experiments. The air suddenly tingled with electricity, and the reflector of the Penumbra, after flashing a brief sentence, was shattered like a mirror struck by a bullet. I saw the child Beato come running towards his mother, who rose with the cry of one in a spasm of pain, and at the same instant Beato fell headlong. The objects about me seemed reeling. Vaini stood gasping as though asphyxiated, the maid Agnese staggered and fled. Looking upon our marvellous apparatus, I saw that it was split, bent, and shivered out of all shape. What supernatural force, I wondered, had thus smitten it to atoms? The effect upon us who stood near resembled that of a moderate submarine explosion upon fish. Delilah lifted her boy to his feet, and Vaini came to me, his face grey with excitement.

"Are you hurt, Maestro?" I asked, as he cautiously raised the fragments of his invention.

"Hush!" he whispered, aghast at his own achievement. "It was another voice . . . *it was the murdered man speaking!*"

We stood silent, spell-bound, gazing upon the debris of our failure. Then he gathered the riven and twisted parts and tossed them into a clump of oleander. Drawing me aside he said: "One word before I go. At the mandate of the Camorra, an order has been issued by the Court forbidding me to continue this investigation. That order will be served upon me this afternoon, probably accompanied by a police notice to leave Naples. But neither order touches you, and I think you can remain without much risk. Only be very careful that no one gets at you with a stiletto. I ask you to stay because my heart is set upon solving the Cinquedea crime. There is now but one way to success—you must spend a few months in Naples and marry Saverio's widow."

"Vaini," I interrupted angrily, "I have stood a great deal of nonsense, but this——"

"Have you no pride in your work?" retorted the Professor, taking my hand in his and regarding me with a smile of intelligent persuasion. "Is yours the shallow nature that recoils before a pebble in the way? Would you stoop to folly at the instant of success? No, I have a presentiment that next month you will rejoin me at the Villa, bringing tidings of great joy."

I had been far from pleased with my tutor's interrogatory, which was brutal in method and unfair in its stratagems. I felt sincerely sorry for the accused woman, and more than ever doubted her guilt. Having lingered a moment to regain my composure, I presently perceived that Vaini had gone, Beato been comforted and dismissed, and Delilah . . .

Before me, at a little distance, amid the ground flame of jasmines and virgin lilies, was Delilah, kneeling upon a garden bench, her hands lightly clasped, her auburn hair turned golden in that dazzling sunlight. She was clad in a sang dieu crimson gown, against which her half-bared arms gleamed like silver, and I divined what fires ran in the veins of that splendid body. The Italian sunshine, like a shaft from the sun-god's quiver, laid its radiance on her face, and her look of silent adoration might have seemed an unconscious recurrence to the pagan worship of the sun. Once she threw her white arms out in passionate entreaty towards the freedom yonder, and tears glistened in her eyes. High upon the wall a thread of water issued from a marble lion's mouth, falling into a basin with the music of fairy bells. My throat was suddenly dry, my eyes curiously moist, and a swift impulse drew me towards this woman who stood alone, with all the world

against her. In what field, I wondered, were her thoughts; and a voice within me answered, "It is November, winter draws on, the birds are still, the roses dead. What if a winter rose should bloom, and some stray love-bird sing in December!"

I stood thus gazing, as lost perhaps in my musings as she in hers. The lurid tragedy wherein she moved, however guiltless, was outlined before me. Was it for nothing that we had been thus suddenly and strangely drawn together, or could we awake and keep the crystal of our dream unshattered? Was I stretching forth eager hands only to clutch a shadow—only to remember the magnetic summons of her music with the vague regret of a kiss that ended in a tear?

Suddenly she beheld me, and rising, stood against the jade background of a cluster of laurel—a Daphne recalled from the laurel into life. The garden wall behind her was festooned with Spanish moss and columbine, and there were wild flower stains of amethyst on the greensward. The breath of June was on the lips of November, and I knew that it was the dreaming time of day. With a delicious air of ease and security, she beckoned me, and in suave Italian fashion said, "I always think of you as you came to me in my distress with hands overflowing with roses. You called them *Toujours ou Jamais*. A moment ago I was alone with my day-dream—that with to-morrow's sunset you and I might go—*pour toujours* over the rim of the world."

"Are day-dreams wiser," I asked, "than their kindred of the night?"

Lightly, without answering, Delilah slipped her arm through mine, and I looked into the amber sunlight of her eyes as we strayed down the long garden walk together.

IV.

The following day I found on my breakfast-table a note from Delilah asking me to call that afternoon at three. I knew she would receive me upstairs in the music-room, and, having several unfinished observations to complete in the curiosity shop, I timed my arrival for two o'clock. Agnese admitted me, and, having done so, stepped out upon the portico and glanced up and down the quiet street. It flashed upon me that my unexpected arrival disconcerted some arrangement—that some one was expected in anticipation of my visit whose purpose might not be to my advantage. I shuddered to remember what had awaited Cinquedea beneath that roof three weeks before.

I had been but a moment alone, when a well-dressed and distinguished-looking stranger entered and closed the shop-door behind him. He bowed with courtly grace, and asked the favour of a moment's conversation. "Perhaps you do not know me," he began, with frank good nature.

"On the contrary. If I am not mistaken, I saw you here a week ago. You are Chief of the Neapolitan Police."

"We look alike," he answered, with a deprecating wave of the hand. "The fact is, I am Chief of the Neapolitan Camorra. Not that I would do you mischief—quite the reverse," he added reassuringly, "in token whereof behold this watch!" and he displayed Vaini's stolen chronometer.

"That watch," I said, "belongs to Professor Vaini. He told me it had been lost, in the office of the Chief of Police."

"The Chief of Police," echoed my visitor with disgust, "is a man without a soul. He richly deserves to lose this, and I have brought it to be returned to its owner. I am sure you will not forget my honorarium?"

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"Once she threw her white arms out in passionate entreaty towards the freedom yonder, and tears glistened in her eyes"

"Certainly not," I assented; "tell me how much it is to be."

"I am about to do you a far greater service," he continued, taking a pinch of snuff, "than the return of this watch. If you linger in this house, or in Naples, and continue in this miserable murder coil, something disagreeable will befall. Your life is secure, but you might suddenly be transported to a remote fastness in the Apennines, where you would remain—the blessed saints alone can say how long—till interest in the Cinquedea crime had ended. Two personages whom you have bitterly angered, Riva and Scarafaggio, are not far hence with a couple of bravos. Without me," he added, flecking a grain of snuff from his waistcoat, "you would not leave this house alive to-day, though you might leave it manacled to-night for some unknown destination."

"But I am working with the authority and protection of the police," I ejaculated in astonishment.

"Signore," replied the Italian, lifting his hand as one who takes an oath, "it is but yesterday the Chief of Police exclaimed in my hearing of you and Valmi that he would no longer risk his immortal soul in the service of men who talk with Satan."

"I have no money about me," I said, remembering the meagre few hundred francs in my purse. "But give me the watch and tell me the amount of your fee, and you shall have my cheque before night."

"I never doubted," said my visitor with whole-hearted graciousness, "that your promise is as good as that of the Camorra. You will send me ten thousand francs, and you shall not be disturbed to-day by those who seek to do you mischief. But by to-morrow noon you must have left Naples."

"I am here," I observed coolly, "as the adviser of Signora Cinquedea, and shall remain—unless she bids me go."

The Chief of the Camorra returned his snuff-box to a side pocket and eyed me with swift comprehension. "Or unless she goes with you," he murmured with an insinuating smile. Then rising, he made me a bow and departed.

To be again in Delilah's presence gave me a curious thrill. On the floor sat Beato, and before him a basket of fruit—bunches of grapes, dusk-red apples, and great yellow pears. He was a handsome boy, wild-faced as his mother, but darker—almost as dark as Capitano Riva. Mirthful, yet wistful-eyed as a little faun, he needed only the panther skin and tipped ears to seem a boy-faun revelling amid the votive fruit of classic altars.

"I am glad you have come," said the faun's mother, motioning to a seat beside her. "We will smoke a little, and talk of pleasant things. For a day or two you have looked weary. Your studies with Valmi will age you before your time."

"Our studies," I replied, "are a realm I fain would never leave—a realm of shaded calm, of spirit calling to spirit across the twilight of centuries, of altitudes yet unmeasured."

"One might think you were talking of Rosamond's bower," interrupted the lady, with malicious mirth. "But I remember that would be no more to you than the murmur of a sea we have read of but never sailed. Tell me frankly, when this foul storm is past, what shall you do, or whither go?"

"You will need repose when that day comes," I answered, "and I am as heartily weary as you can be of everything here. Suppose we spend a couple of months on the upper Nile, amid the silence of the Phamolis. We should possess the gift that kings know not—a life wholly our own."

Delilah looked at me in a way that said things.

"Take heed," she exclaimed, with a rippling laugh. "Love, left uncared for, takes the first comer by the hand. What if in this forsaken place that fate were yours!"

"I should lead him," I replied, "to your roof-garden, and pluck for him the last amorous roses of summer."

"Saying silly things blisters the tongue," retorted the lady. "And yet," she added, stretching her arms as if to embrace the universe, "to think of gathering that rare bouquet . . . to look beyond the palm-trees and the centuries upon the altar of Osiris . . . to learn more of life than the taste of its shining dust . . . to gather something better than driftwood . . . to dig the burnt gold of poppies that bloomed in Cleopatra's garden . . . to watch the stars through fragrant, palpitating nights . . . the heart almost ceases beating for rapture. Would it not seem," she whispered, laying a magnetic hand on mine, "like a kiss of the gods?"

"It would be a kiss of Delilah," I gravely asseuted.

At that instant Agnese entered and handed her mistress a telegram, and placed what was left of our Penumbra on the table. I moved discreetly away to gaze on the long breakers rolling upon the silver beach, in silver silence. Overhead, athwart the ceiling, a wavering line of light flickered its reflection of the sunshine in the garden tank below. And I remembered the fiery writing on the wall, and wondered if some fresh tragedy were imminent.

When I again turned Agnese had gone, and Delilah's eyes had narrowed to a look of feline cunning. I was conscious that the passing instants were swift and sinister. I could read, without the Penumbra, that in the back of her brain lay a resolve like a coiled serpent about to strike. I divined the substance of her telegram as though its brief phrase had been before me. Obviously it was a caution from Riva and Scarafaggio that I had taken such measures as precluded their attack. They naturally attributed to me the Camorra's order to halt. Moreover, they returned the shapeless fabric of our Penumbra, whose wreck had doubtless been found by the gardener near the place where I had been seen standing, and which had been given them for examination. They had naturally stamped it with the character of an infernal machine such as intimates of Satan would employ.

The colour had faded from her sun-browned face, and in a voice of deadly quietness she said, "I, who am alone in a world of wrongdoers, wish to question you as to the experiment you and Vaini have applied to the murder of my husband, and of which I was the object yesterday."

"It holds a splendid secret," I observed with genial good-humour; "the Professor calls it the Terror of the Unknown."

"It becomes you to talk of secrets," she cried, choking with anger, "you who have sought to pry into a secret that involved fame and reputation. Men have been stabbed to death for less."

"You speak now of your dead husband," I interrupted, catching her malice.

"I speak less of him than of your friend Vaini, whom I have ordered out of Naples."

I watched her with rising admiration. With her classic face and athletic poise and gladiator's courage, she seemed in her danger one of those about to die, who to this day salute Cæsar in the arena of life.

"Every hour for a fortnight past," she continued, "as I tasted the dregs of a misery men drink from and go mad, I have asked myself—are you for or against

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"In a Venetian mirror I beheld the reflection of Saverio's wife, and saw her rest a foot upon a chair, lift the black skirt, and take something from her garter"

me? You who came as a friend," she cried, smiting the shattered Penumbra, "brought *this* that was to deliver me into the snare of the fowler. Every time that I move to save myself an outstretched hand that is yours motions me back. It was this devilish thing that, as Vaini plied me with wicked questions, took my vitality and numbed my thoughts — this that bewitched Agnese and flung Beato to the ground."

"In Vaini's orange-grove at the head of a long straight walk, stands the marble statue of Apollo which I bought at the sale of Cinquedea's collection."

There was a faint sound at the closed door behind me, and, knowing Italian ways, I instinctively wheeled, half drawing a revolver. Was it merely Agnese eavesdropping, or had Riva and Scarafaggio stolen a march upon the Camorra?

In a Venetian mirror I beheld the reflection of Saverio's wife, and saw her rest a foot upon a chair, lift the black skirt, and take something from her garter. Then, with right hand uplifted, she sprang noiselessly upon me, and, turning, I caught her wrist and bent it so violently back that the fingers relaxed and a shining blade fell to the floor.

In that instant I awoke from my hallucination, stabbed to the heart by the stiletto which had not touched me.

A silence followed wherein many things crumbled away. A yellow light shone in Delilah's lynx eyes, her lips quivering as though she breathed a curse. And the odd fancy came to me that if indeed the souls of those who have deeply loved or passionately hated seek one another at the last, her spirit would strive, as the final act of Earth, to lay a malediction upon mine.

Vaini's cloister garden grows more poetically beautiful each year. Its *Toujours ou Jamais* roses, flowering in December, have covered its walls with riotous bloom. The antique marbles wherewith the master adorned its inglenooks have become garlanded with violets.

Across the translucence of Italian atmosphere, a ruby amber veil is laid at every Ottobrata upon the hill sides, tingeing them with the red gold of Imperial Rome that fades, as shadows lengthen, to the mediæval calm of silver twilight. And beyond the sky-swung tracery of olive branches, beyond the sunset's face of flame, beyond last year's bird-call, I remember the sinister task Vaini set me, and listen to its whisper of subtle and significant things.

To this day it is not officially known who killed Saverio, the trial having been abandoned "for want of evidence."

Doubtless the truth was traced upon the Penumbra at the moment when its mechanism—strained beyond inherent limitations and smitten by some force of Nature which resents the puny investigation of man—flew into atoms. The Professor occasionally alluded to this failure as the supreme disappointment of his life, and solemnly declared that, in hands less maladroit than mine, the possible would have been overstepped.

Here, in this Villa Sirena, which in life was his delight, are preserved those contrivances and time-stained volumes of curious lore which were his implements—symbols of life's untiring and fruitless quest for light and happiness and peace.

In Vaini's orange grove, at the head of a long straight walk, stands the marble statue of Apollo which I bought at the sale of Cinquedea's collection and gave the Professor in memento of our experiment. Ages have mellowed it to a rich old ivory. The sun-god stands lightly poised, nude, an athlete fresh from the bath, statuesquely meditative, keeping the secret of the Cinquedea crime, and still bearing at the knee a faint dark stain where one who came red-handed from the murder groped softly by in the dark. The figure holds a seven-stringed lyre, touching a string in symphony with each elegiac phrase. For the sun-god is speaking with the thrilling cadence of the Spartan flutes as one that delivers some heroic utterance, intent, self-centred, masterful, not distraught with a thousand things. It is less the figure of a god than a type of the antique mind. It possesses the gift of divine youth, and is telling of the singers of songs that still live, of the makers of things that endure—deathless and superb—to this day. Behind the eloquent silence of his phrase ring the notes the Greeks employed to accent the spoken word—from the high contralto of transcendent joy and triumph to the deeps of suffering and death. Whoever listens, hears an accent of that intense concentration which throughout the classic life reflected itself in every achievement, making the examples bequeathed to us immortal. About this image still gleams the light that shone upon the spears of Marathon. Is it too much to say that the human heart of all ages is the lyre whose strings the sun-god thrills? And standing thus in the sunshine, in the delight of the sapphire blue, in the midst of the laurel he loved, and filling the air with his song craft, that figure reminds me how widespread and lasting has been the worship of the sun, call we the sun-god Zeus, or Baal, or Moloch, or Apollo, or Amon Ra, from Cleopatra presenting the new-born Cesarion to Osiris, to the Blackfoot squaw that lifts her infant to the benediction of the rising sun.

When, in this land of summer, the summer dies, I walk in Vaini's garden and pause to look upon that silent yet eloquent statue—and to remember Delilah.

I think of her as she appeared that sunny afternoon in her garden, kneeling with beautiful face uplifted and transfigured. And before me, as I write, is the little silver goblet she gave me that day, bearing its fateful sarcasm, *Amicizia è Fedelità*.

One evening, five years after the Cinquedea crime, walking thus amid the orange-trees, I became suddenly conscious of a haunting, fleeting, twilight presence, and, turning to one beside me, cried, "Delilah is dead!" A week later

I went to Naples, and called upon the curato who had spiritually attended her at the last.

It is a Neapolitan superstition that dying people see things. Even the elect are not wholly alone, and many a saint has beheld Satan peeping at the window. "In the sunshine there lurks a shadow—athwart the shuttered casement there steals a gleam of light. It is thus, Signore," murmured the little old priest, "we know that something waits and beckons."

"Was Scarafaggio brother, foster brother, or lover?" I asked.

"Cosa vuole, what would you? Upon the Sacrosanto I know not—nor yet the manner of Saverio's death."

"Its manner," I said, "was plain as the crust in your soup. Delilah incited Riva and Scarafaggio, stationed them in the room, and when the attack commenced, crept back and looked on. And to think that between those two men there was such jealous hate that each would rather have spared Saverio and stabbed the other!"

"You seem to have known them well," observed the little Padre, lifting his faded eyes to mine with a smile. "Perhaps you knew Delilah very well also?"

"She cut the acquaintance short," I answered drily—"as women sometimes do."

"From me she would hear nothing," observed the gentle curato after a pause—"nothing—being half a pagan; yet, when the burden of earth fell away . . . perhaps her soul flew fair!"

WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR.

The cloister garden.

THE KIT-BAG.

BY ALGERNON BLACKWOOD.

ILLUSTRATED BY CYRUS CUNEO.

WHEN the words "Not Guilty" sounded through the crowded court-room that dark December afternoon, Arthur Wilbraham, the great criminal K.C., and leader for the triumphant defence, was represented by his junior, but Johnson, his private secretary, carried the verdict across to his chambers like lightning.

"It's what we expected, I think," said the barrister, without emotion, "and, personally, I am glad the case is over." There was no particular sign of pleasure that his defence of John Turk, the murderer, on a plea of insanity, had been successful, for no doubt he felt, as everybody who had watched the case felt, that no man had ever better deserved the gallows.

"I'm glad too," said Johnson. He had sat in the court for ten days watching the face of the man who had carried out with callous detail one of the most brutal and cold-blooded murders of recent years.

The counsel glanced up at his secretary. They were more than employer and employed; for family and other reasons, they were friends. "Ah, I remember, yes," he said with a kind smile, "and you want to get away for Christmas? You're going to skate and ski in the Alps, aren't you? If I was your age I'd come with you."

Johnson laughed shortly. He was a young man of twenty-six, with a delicate face like a girl's. "I can catch the morning boat now," he said; "but that's not the reason I'm glad the trial is over. I'm glad it's over because I've seen the last of that man's dreadful face. It positively haunted me. That white skin, with the black hair brushed low over the forehead, is a thing I shall never forget, and the description of the way the dismembered body was crammed and packed with lime into that——"

"Don't dwell on it, my dear fellow," interrupted the other, looking at him curiously out of his keen eyes, "don't think about it. Such pictures have a trick of coming back when one least wants them." He paused a moment. "Now go," he added presently, "and enjoy your holiday. I shall want all your energy for my Parliamentary work when you get back. And don't break your neck skiing."

Johnson shook hands and took his leave. At the door he turned suddenly.

"I knew there was something I wanted to ask you," he said. "Would you mind lending me one of your kit-bags? It's too late to get one to-night, and I leave in the morning before the shops are open."

"Of course; I'll send Henry over with it to your rooms. You shall have it the moment I get home."

"I promise to take great care of it," said Johnson gratefully, delighted to think that within thirty hours he would be nearing the brilliant sunshine of the high Alps in winter. The thought of that criminal court was like an evil dream in his mind.

He dined at his club and went on to Bloomsbury, where he occupied the top floor in one of those old, gaunt houses in which the rooms are large and lofty. The floor below his own was vacant and unfurnished, and below that were other lodgers whom he did not know. It was cheerless, and he looked forward heartily to a change. The night was even more cheerless: it was miserable, and few people were about. A cold, sleety rain was driving down the streets before the keenest east wind he had ever felt. It howled dismally among the big, gloomy houses of the great squares, and when he reached his rooms he heard it whistling and shouting over the world of black roofs beyond his windows.

In the hall he met his landlady, shading a candle from the draughts with her thin hand. "This come by a man from Mr. Wilbr'im's, sir."

She pointed to what was evidently the kit-bag, and Johnson thanked her and took it upstairs with him. "I shall be going abroad in the morning for ten days,

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Mrs. Monks," he said. "I'll leave an address for letters."

"And I hope you'll 'ave a merry Christmas, sir," she said, in a raucous, wheezy voice that suggested spirits, "and better weather than this."

"I hope so too," replied her lodger, shuddering a little as the wind went roaring down the street outside.

When he got upstairs he heard the sleet volleying against the window-panes. He put his kettle on to make a cup of hot coffee, and then set about putting a few things in order for his absence. "And now I must pack—such as my packing is," he laughed to himself, and set to work at once.

He liked the packing, for it brought the snow mountains so vividly before him, and made him forget the unpleasant scenes of the past ten days. Besides, it was not elaborate in nature. His friend had lent him the very thing—a stout canvas kit-bag, sack-shaped, with holes round the neck for the brass bar and padlock. It was a bit shapeless, true, and not much to look at, but its capacity was unlimited, and there was no need to pack carefully. He shoved in his waterproof coat, his fur cap and gloves, his skates and climbing boots, his sweaters, snow boots, and ear caps; and then on the top of these he piled his woollen shirts and underwear, his thick socks, puttees, and knickerbockers. The dress-suit came next, in case the hotel people dressed for dinner, and then, thinking of the best way to pack his white shirts, he paused a moment to reflect. "That's the worst of these kit-bags," he mused vaguely, standing in the centre of the sitting-room, where he had come to fetch some string.

It was after ten o'clock. A furious gust of wind rattled the windows as though to hurry him up, and he thought with pity of the poor Londoners whose Christmas would be spent in such a climate, whilst he was skimming over snowy slopes in bright sunshine, and dancing in the evening with rosy-cheeked girls—— Ah! that reminded him; he must put in his dancing-pumps and evening socks. He crossed over from his sitting-room to the cupboard on the landing where he kept his linen.

And as he did so he heard some one coming softly up the stairs.

He stood still a moment on the landing to listen. It was Mrs. Monks's step, he thought; she must be coming up with the last post. But then the steps ceased suddenly, and he heard no more. They were at least two flights down, and he came to the conclusion they were too heavy to be those of his bibulous landlady. No doubt they belonged to a late lodger who had mistaken his floor. He went into his bedroom and packed his pumps and dress-shirts as best he could.

The kit-bag by this time was two-thirds full, and stood upright on its own base like a sack of flour. For the first time he noticed that it was old and dirty, the canvas faded and worn, and that it had obviously been subjected to rather rough treatment. It was not a very nice bag to have sent him—certainly not a new one, or one that his chief valued. He gave the matter a passing thought, and went on with his packing. Once or twice, however, he caught himself wondering who it could have been wandering down below, for Mrs. Monks had not come up with letters, and the floor was empty and unfurnished. From time to time, moreover, he was almost certain he heard a soft tread of some one padding about over the bare boards—cautiously, stealthily, as silently as possible—and, further, that the sounds had been lately coming distinctly nearer.

For the first time in his life he began to feel a little creepy. Then, as though to emphasise this feeling, an odd thing happened: as he left the bedroom, having just packed his recalcitrant white shirts, he noticed that the top of the kit-bag lopped over towards him with an extraordinary resemblance to a human face. The canvas fell into a fold like a nose and forehead, and the brass rings for the padlock just filled the position of the eyes. A shadow—or was it a travel stain? for he could not tell exactly—looked like hair. It gave him rather a turn, for it was so absurdly, so outrageously, like the face of John Turk, the murderer.

He laughed, and went into the front room, where the light was stronger.

"That horrid case has got on my mind," he thought; "I shall be glad of a change of scene and air." In the sitting-room, however, he was not pleased to hear again that stealthy tread upon the stairs, and to realise that it was much closer than before, as well as unmistakably

real. And this time he got up and went out to see who it could be creeping about on the upper staircase at so late an hour.

But the sound ceased; there was no one visible on the stairs. He went to the floor below, not without trepidation, and turned on the electric light to make sure that no one was hiding in the empty rooms of the unoccupied suite. There was not a stick of furniture large enough to hide a dog. Then he called over the banisters to Mrs. Monks, but there was no answer, and his voice echoed down into the dark vault of the house, and was lost in the roar of the gale that howled outside. Every one was in bed and asleep—every one except himself and the owner of this soft and stealthy tread.

"My absurd imagination, I suppose," he thought. "It must have been the wind after all, although—it seemed so *very* real and close, I thought." He went back to his packing. It was by this time getting on towards midnight. He drank his coffee up and lit another pipe—the last before turning in.

It is difficult to say exactly at what point fear begins, when the causes of that fear are not plainly before the eyes. Impressions gather on the surface of the mind, film by film, as ice gathers upon the surface of still water, but often so lightly that they claim no definite recognition from the consciousness. Then a point is reached where the accumulated impressions become a definite emotion, and the mind realises that something has happened. With something of a start, Johnson suddenly recognised that he felt nervous—oddly nervous; also, that for some time past the causes of this feeling had been gathering slowly in his mind, but that he had only just reached the point where he was forced to acknowledge them.

It was a singular and curious malaise that had come over him, and he hardly knew what to make of it. He felt as though he were doing something that was strongly objected to by another person, another person, moreover, who had some right to object. It was a most disturbing and disagreeable feeling, not unlike the persistent promptings of conscience: almost, in fact, as if he were doing something he knew to be wrong. Yet, though he searched vigorously and honestly in his mind, he could nowhere lay his finger upon the secret of this growing uneasiness, and it perplexed him. More, it distressed and frightened him.

"Pure nerves, I suppose," he said aloud with a forced laugh. "Mountain air will cure all that! Ah," he added, still speaking to himself, "and that reminds me—my snow-glasses."

He was standing by the door of the bedroom during this brief soliloquy, and as he passed quickly towards the sitting-room to fetch them from the cupboard he saw out of the corner of his eye the indistinct outline of a figure standing on the stairs, a few feet from the top. It was some one in a stooping position, with one hand on the banisters, and the face peering up towards the landing. And at the same moment he heard a shuffling footstep. The person who had been creeping about below all this time had at last come up to his own floor. Who in the world could it be? And what in the name of Heaven did he want?

Johnson caught his breath sharply and stood stock still. Then, after a few seconds' hesitation, he found his courage, and turned to investigate. The stairs, he saw to his utter amazement, were empty; there was no one. He felt a series of cold shivers run over him, and something about the muscles of his legs gave a little and grew weak. For the space of several minutes he peered steadily into the shadows that congregated about the top of the staircase where he had seen the figure, and then he walked fast—almost ran, in fact—into the light of the front room; but hardly had he passed inside the doorway when he heard some one come up the stairs behind him with a quick bound and go swiftly into his bedroom. It was a heavy, but at the same time a stealthy footstep—the tread of somebody who did not wish to be seen. And it was at this precise moment that the nervousness he had hitherto experienced leaped the boundary line, and entered the state of fear, almost of acute, unreasoning fear. Before it turned into terror there was a further boundary to cross, and beyond that again lay the region of pure horror. Johnson's position was an unenviable one.

"By Jove! That *was* some one on the stairs, then," he muttered, his flesh crawling all over, "and whoever it was

has now gone into my bedroom." His delicate, pale face turned absolutely white, and for some minutes he hardly knew what to think or do. Then he realised intuitively that delay only set a premium upon fear; and he crossed the landing boldly and went straight into the other room, where, a few seconds before, the steps had disappeared.

"Who's there? Is that you, Mrs. Monks?" he called aloud, as he went, and heard the first half of his words echo down the empty stairs, while the second half fell dead against the curtains in a room that apparently held no other human figure than his own.

"Who's there?" he called again, in a voice unnecessarily loud and that only just held firm. "What do you want here?"

The curtains swayed very slightly, and, as he saw it, his heart felt as if it almost missed a beat, yet he dashed forward and drew them aside with a rush. A window, streaming with rain, was all that met his gaze. He continued his search, but in vain; the cupboards held nothing but rows of clothes, hanging motionless, and under the bed there was no sign of any one hiding. He stepped backwards into the middle of the room, and, as he did so, something all but tripped him up. Turning with a sudden spring of alarm he saw—the kit-bag.

"Odd!" he thought. "That's not where I left it!" A few moments before it had surely been on his right, between the bed and the bath; he did not remember having moved it. It was very curious. What in the world was the matter with everything? Were all his senses gone queer? A terrific gust of wind tore at the windows, dashing the sleet against the glass with the force of small gun-shot, and then fled away howling dismally over the waste of Bloomsbury roofs. A sudden vision of the Channel next day rose in his mind and recalled him sharply to realities.

"There's no one here at any rate; that's quite clear!" he exclaimed aloud. Yet at the time he uttered them he knew perfectly well that his words were not true and that he did not believe them himself. He felt exactly as though some one was hiding close about him, watching all his movements, trying to hinder his packing in some way. "And two of my senses," he added, keeping up the pretence, "have played me the most absurd tricks: the steps I heard and the figure I saw were both entirely imaginary."

He went back to the front room, poked the fire into a blaze, and sat down before it to think. What impressed him more than anything else was the fact that the kit-bag was no longer where he had left it. It had been dragged nearer to the door.

What happened afterwards that night happened, of course, to a man already excited by fear, and was perceived by a mind that had not the full and proper control, therefore, of the senses. Outwardly, Johnson remained calm and master of himself to the end, pretending to the very last that everything he witnessed had a natural explanation, or was merely delusions of his tired nerves. But inwardly, in his very heart, he knew all along that some one had been hiding downstairs in the empty suite when he came in, that this person had watched his opportunity and then stealthily made his way up to the bedroom, and that all he saw and heard afterwards, from the moving of the kit-bag to—well, to the other things this story has to tell—were caused directly by the presence of this invisible person.

And it was here, just when he most desired to keep his mind and thoughts controlled, that the vivid pictures received day after day upon the mental plates exposed in the court-room of the Old Bailey, came strongly to light and developed themselves in the dark room of his inner vision. Unpleasant, haunting memories have a way of coming to life again just when the mind least desires them—in the silent watches of the night, on sleepless pillows, during the lonely hours spent by sick and dying beds. And so now, in the same way, Johnson saw nothing but the dreadful face of John Turk, the murderer, lowering at him from every corner of his mental field of vision; the white skin, the evil eyes, and the fringe of black hair low over the forehead. All the pictures of those ten days in court crowded back into his mind unbidden, and very vivid.

"This is all rubbish and nerves," he exclaimed at length, springing with sudden energy from his chair. "I shall finish my packing and go to bed. I'm overwrought, overtired. No doubt, at this rate I shall hear steps and things all night!"

"Not three feet from him the man stood, as staid as he had seen him day after day in the Old Bailey"

But his face was deadly white all the same. He snatched up his field-glasses and walked across to the bedroom, humming a music-hall song as he went—a trifle too loud to be natural; and the instant he crossed the threshold and stood within the room something turned cold about his heart, and he felt that every hair on his head stood up.

The kit bag lay close in front of him, several feet nearer to the door than he had left it, and just over its crumpled top he saw a head and face slowly sinking down out of sight as though some one were crouching behind it to hide, and at the same moment a sound like a long-drawn sigh was distinctly audible in the still air about him between the gusts of the storm outside.

Johnson had more courage and will-power than the girlish indecision of his face indicated; but at first such a wave of terror came over him that for some seconds he could do nothing but stand and stare. A violent trembling ran down his back and legs, and he was conscious of a foolish, almost a hysterical, impulse to scream aloud. That sigh seemed in his very ear, and the air still quivered with it. It was unmistakably a human sigh.

"Who's there?" he said at length, finding his voice, but though he meant to speak with loud decision, the tones come out instead in a faint whisper, for he had partly lost the control of his tongue and lips.

He stepped forward, so that he could see all round and over the kit-bag. Of course there was nothing there, nothing but the faded carpet and the bulging canvas sides. He put out his hands and threw open the mouth of the sack where it had fallen over, being only three parts full, and then he saw for the first time that round the inside, some six inches from the top, there ran a broad smear of dull crimson. It was an old and faded blood stain. He uttered a scream, and drew back his hands as if they had been burnt. At the same moment the kit-bag gave a faint, but unmistakable, lurch forward towards the door.

Johnson collapsed backwards, searching with his hands for the support of something solid, and the door, being farther behind him than he realised, received his weight just in time to prevent his falling, and shut to with a resounding bang. At the same moment the swinging of his left arm accidentally touched the electric switch, and the light in the room went out.

It was an awkward and disagreeable predicament, and if Johnson had not been possessed of real pluck he might have done all manner of foolish things. As it was, however, he pulled himself together, and groped furiously for the little brass knob to turn the light on again. But the rapid closing of the door had set the coats hanging on it a swinging, and his fingers became entangled in a confusion of sleeves and pockets, so that it was some moments before he found the switch. And in those few moments of bewilderment and terror two things happened that sent him beyond recall over the boundary into the region of genuine horror—he distinctly heard the kit-bag shuffling heavily across the floor in jerks, and close in front of his face sounded once again the sigh of a human being.

In his anguished efforts to find the brass button on the wall he nearly scraped the nails from his fingers, but even then, in those frenzied moments of alarm—so swift and alert are the impressions of a mind keyed up by a vivid emotion—he had time to realise that he dreaded the return of the light, and that it might be better for him to stay hidden in the merciful screen of darkness. It was but the impulse of a moment, however, and before he had time to act upon it he had yielded automatically to the original desire, and the room was flooded again with light.

But the second instinct had been right. It would have been better for him to have stayed in the shelter of the kind darkness. For there, close before him, bending over the half-packed kit-bag, clear as life in the merciless glare of the electric light, stood the figure of John Turk, the murderer. Not three feet from him the man stood, the fringe of black hair marked plainly against the pallor of the forehead, the whole horrible presentment of the scoundrel, as vivid as he had seen him day after day in the Old Bailey, when he stood there in the dock, cynical and callous, under the very shadow of the gallows.

In a flash Johnson realised what it all meant: the dirty and much used bag, the smear of crimson within the top; the dreadful stretched condition of the bulging sides. He remembered how the victim's

body had been stuffed into a canvas bag for burial, the ghastly, dismembered fragments forced with lime into this very bag, and the bag itself produced as evidence—— It all came back to him as clear as day . . .

Very softly and stealthily his hand groped behind him for the handle of the door, but before he could actually turn it the very thing that he most of all dreaded came about, and John Turk lifted his devil's face and looked at him. At the same moment that heavy sigh passed through the air of the room, formulated somehow into words: "It's my bag. And I want it."

Johnson just remembered clawing the door open, and then falling in a heap upon the floor of the landing, as he tried frantically to make his way into the front room.

He remained unconscious for a long time, and it was still dark when he opened his eyes and realised that he was lying, stiff and bruised, on the cold boards. Then the memory of what he had seen rushed back into his mind, and he promptly fainted again. When he woke the second time the wintry dawn was just beginning to peep in at the windows, painting the stairs a cheerless, dismal grey, and he managed to crawl into the front room, and cover himself with an overcoat in the arm-chair, where at length he fell asleep.

A great clamour woke him. He recognised Mrs. Monks's voice, loud and voluble.

"What! Yoo ain't been to bed, sir! Are you ill, or has anything 'appened? And there's an urgent gentleman to see you, though it ain't seven o'clock yet, and——"

"Who is it?" he stammered. "I'm all right, thanks. Fell asleep in my chair, I suppose."

"Some one from Mr. Wilb'rim's, and he says he ought to see you quick before you go abroad, and I told him——"

"Show him up, please, at once," said Johnson, whose head was whirling, and his mind was still full of dreadful visions.

Mr. Wilbraham's man came in with many apologies, and explained briefly and quickly that an absurd mistake had been made, and that the wrong kit-bag had been sent over the night before.

"Henry somehow got hold of the one that came over from the court-room, and Mr. Wilbraham only discovered it when he saw his own lying in his room, and asked why it had not gone to you," the man said.

"Oh!" said Johnson stupidly.

"And he must have brought you the one from the murder case instead, sir, I'm afraid," the man continued, without the ghost of an expression on his face. "The one John Turk packed the dead body in. Mr. Wilbraham's awful upset about it, sir, and told me to come over first thing this morning with the right one, as you were leaving by the boat."

He pointed to a clean-looking kit-bag on the floor, which he had just brought. "And I was to bring the other one back, sir," he added casually.

For some minutes Johnson could not find his voice. At last he pointed in the direction of his bedroom. "Perhaps you would kindly unpack it for me. Just empty the things out on the floor."

The man disappeared into the other room, and was gone for five minutes. Johnson heard the shifting to and fro of the bag, and the rattle of the skates and boots being unpacked.

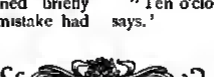
"Thank you, sir," the man said, returning with the bag folded over his arm. "And can I do anything more to help you, sir?"

"What is it?" asked Johnson, seeing that he still had something he wished to say.

The man shuffled and looked mysterious. "Beg pardon, sir, but knowing your interest in the Turk case, I thought you'd maybe like to know what's happened——"

"Yes"

"John Turk killed hisself last night with poison immediately on getting his release, and he left a note for Mr. Wilbraham saying as he'd be much obliged if they'd have him put away, same as the woman he murdered, in the old kit-bag."

"What time—did he do it?" asked Johnson.

"Ten o'clock last night, sir, the warder says.'